

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN ANTHROPOLOGY

Animism and the Question of Life

Istvan Praet



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The central purpose of this book is to help change the terms of the debate on animism, a classic theme in anthropology. It combines some of the finest ethnographic material currently available (including firsthand research on the Chachi of Ecuador) with an unusually broad geographic scope (the Americas, Asia, and Africa). Edward B. Tylor originally defined animism as the first phase in the development of religion. The heyday of cultural evolutionism may be over, but his basic conception is commonly assumed to remain valid in at least one respect: there is still a broad consensus that everything is alive within animism, or at least that more things are alive than a modern scientific observer would allow for (e.g., clouds, rivers, mountains). It is considered self-evident that animism is based on a kind of exaggeration: its adherents are presumed to impute life to this, that, and the other in a remarkably generous manner. Against the prevailing consensus, this book argues that if animism has one outstanding feature, it is its peculiar restrictiveness. Animistic notions of life are astonishingly uniform across the globe, insofar as they are restricted rather than exaggerated. In the modern Western cosmology, life overlaps with the animate. Within animism, however, life is always conditional, and therefore tends to be limited to one's kin, one's pets, and perhaps the plants in one's garden. Thus it emerges that 'our' modern biological concept of life is stranger than generally thought.

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For Anna

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Acknowledgments

When—as a graduate student in Belgium—I was captivated by a book chapter on blowpipes and spears and Amazonian peccaries, I did not expect this to be the beginning of a long journey that would take me to the UK, Ecuador, France, Germany, and—ultimately—back to the UK. My debts are endless and my gratitude to all of those who have helped me along the way goes beyond the feeble attempt to express it in these few paragraphs.

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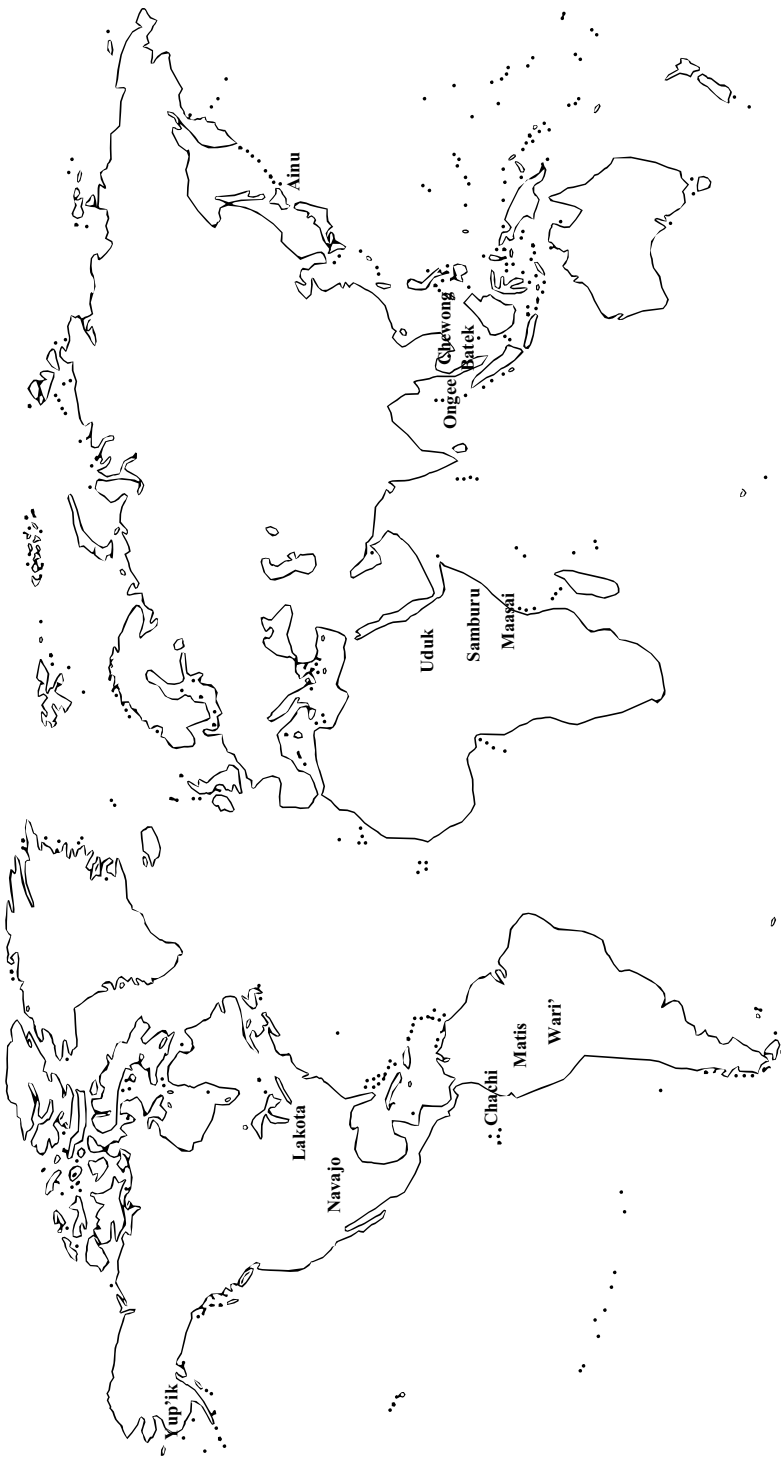
big thank you. At the 2010 EASA-conference in Maynooth (Ireland) I was part of a group that set up the 'Biosocial Becomings' research network. I feel very privileged to participate in this on-going collaborative project led by Tim Ingold and Gísli Pálsson. The considerate way in which these two grantees managed our panel and oversaw the publication of the ensuing volume was a marvellous experience and I learnt a great deal from it. I thank all my fellow-group members, especially Deborah Heath, Hayder Al-Mohammad, and Vito Laterza. At the 2012 conference of Americanists in Vienna, I participated in a fascinating panel on indigenous notions of humanity. It was coordinated by Aparecida Vilaça, Carlo Bonfiglioli, Alejandro Fujigaki, and Isabel Martinez, and attended by (among others) Minna Opas and the underestimated Dan Rosengren—I thank all of them for their enthusiasm and very much look forward to further collaboration.

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World Map

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Introduction

The various forms of animism that have been documented among so-called indigenous people have more in common than has been appreciated so far. Such forms are very diverse, as ethnography amply illustrates: the ritual taming of captured prey and enemies in Amazonia, Navajo skin-walkers and their witchcraft, Eskimo sea-hunting, the offering of shaved willow sticks during Ainu visiting ceremonies, aboriginal tiger shamanism in Malaysia, the body painting of the Andaman Islanders, the oracles of Uduk ebony diviners, and Samburu cattle raiding are but a few of the practices that have been described—albeit in a loose manner—as animistic. But these forms are also remarkably coherent and stable, at least in some respects. In fact, animism is not only a quite uniform but also a rather static worldwide phenomenon. At first this claim may appear counterintuitive, not to say off the mark. After all, state-of-the-art ethnography tends to highlight its distinctly fractious qualities as well as its historically contingent character. As the cliché goes, animism is notoriously hard to pin down; its manifestations are commonly thought to vary according to unique and irreducible cultural contexts. The great majority of contemporary anthropologists would even hesitate to consider animism as an empirical entity in and of itself. Yet their implicit refusal to acknowledge its coherence and its invariant properties is perhaps not entirely surprising. On the one hand, anthropologists have a penchant to describe particular sites in exquisite detail. On the other hand, many of them strive to understand the greater whole and try to link their findings to general debates that surpass the local and the regional. But striking an adequate balance between those two ambitions has proven to be exceedingly difficult.

All too often, the problem is apprehended as a matter of either/or. Disappointment is unavoidable in such a mind-set: either one privileges highly specialized ethnography (coveted by regional experts but pretty much ignored by anybody else) or one opts for a more global view (often dismissed as overly sweeping). With regards to animism, I suggest, such a stark choice is not a necessity. This book is an attempt to integrate both pathways in a hitherto untested manner, by drawing on some of the finest ethnographic material currently available, combined with an unusually

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broad geographic and a deliberately loosely defined chronological scope. It is a departure from the false dilemma between parts and wholes, as well as an effort to circumvent the stalemate that plagues many anthropological studies of so-called indigenous people today. The aim is to reveal the underestimated solidity, the undervalued originality, and the unsuspected global consistency of something that earlier ethnographers dismissed as mere primitive beliefs. What is more, there is a subversive quality to animism that—I believe—has not been properly measured. By making that quality visible, this book also exposes some of the purportedly unshakable but curiously unacknowledged axioms of ‘our’ modern sciences.

Animism was originally defined as the first phase in the development of religion. Edward Burnett Tylor, author of the epoch-making volume *Primitive Culture* and one of the founding fathers of anthropology, promoted this idea in the late 19th century. He saw animism as a ‘doctrine of universal vitality’:

First and foremost among the causes which transfigure into myth the facts of daily experience, is the belief in the animation of all nature, rising at its highest pitch to personification. This, no occasional or hypothetical action of the mind, is inextricably bound in with that primitive mental state where man recognizes in every detail of his world the operation of personal life and will. [. . .] To the lower tribes of man, sun and stars, trees and rivers, winds and clouds, become personal animate creatures, leading lives conformed to human or animal analogies, and performing their special functions in the universe with the aid of limbs like beasts, or of artificial instruments like men; . . . [Such ideas] rest upon a broad philosophy of nature, early and crude indeed, but thoughtful, consistent, and quite really and seriously meant.¹

The heyday of his doctrine of cultural evolutionism may be over, but Tylor’s basic conception of animism does remain valid in at least two respects. For one thing, it implies a distinctly biological definition of life. For another, it entails a distinctly anthropological definition of humanity. This double assumption, which I will expound further onwards, is still very much with us today—to the best of my knowledge, it has never been challenged in any way. So there is a broad, century-old consensus that—within animism—everything is alive or, at least, that more things are alive than a modern scientific observer would allow for. There is also a broad, century-old consensus that—within animism—everything is human or, at least, that more things are human than a modern scientist would expect. The ethnographic record is indeed replete with examples of so-called indigenous people who consider such things as clouds, rivers, or mountains to be alive. That such people tend to attribute human properties to animals, plants, or weather phenomena has also been documented abundantly. To this day, it is often thought that animism is based on something of an exaggeration or, as Tylor

has put it himself, on ‘an idea of pervading life and will in nature far outside modern limits’.² In other words, animists supposedly have in common that they impute life and/or humanity to this, that, and the other in a remarkably generous manner.

Back in the day of Tylor, this exaggeration was unanimously seen as unwarranted—that is why 19th century ethnographers tended to characterize animists as primitive, childish, and irrational. In the meantime, however, anthropology has made a U-turn: in an age of environmental crisis, animism is no longer seen as backward but as praiseworthy and sensible. Yet, Victorian anthropologists and latter-day believers in the intrinsic virtues of indigenous wisdom have something in common; whether they see it as a bad thing or a good thing, the implicit idea of exaggeration remains wholly unquestioned. That animists attribute life to all sorts of things in a particularly unstinting way was and still is considered self-evident. In this study, I question that presumed self-evidence. I will argue that this conception of animism is, in fact, tremendously misleading. I daresay that if anybody would have wanted to obscure the topic deliberately, he or she probably could not have done a better job. Against the most common view, the present study suggests that animism is *not* a matter of inflation beyond reasonableness: it is neither characterized by an exaggerated life, nor by an exaggerated humanity. Quite the contrary: if it has one outstanding feature than it is its peculiar restrictiveness. If animists have one thing in common, I claim, it is precisely their notion of a restricted life and a restricted humanity. The entire book can be seen as an effort to document and explain these parallel notions.

Whereas this claim has been foreshadowed in the work of some authors, one may wonder why it is that so few contemporary ethnographers have ever noticed that distinct restrictiveness. At this point I can only give the provisional answer that it has something to do with the predicament of the modern sciences, and of biology and anthropology in particular. In essence, the problem is that biologists are compelled to see everybody else as ‘minimal’ biologists. In a similar vein, anthropologists tend to see everybody else as ‘minimal’ anthropologists. That is, the belief in ‘other living beings’ and the belief in ‘other human beings’ is taken to be universal. Notions such as ‘wildlife’ and ‘foreigner’ are conceived of as elementary, unproblematic, and applicable to all cultures and societies. Both biologists and anthropologists envisage their primary subject matter as obviously true; that is why they would never refer to it as a ‘belief’ in the first place, as I just did. What is more, they find it impossible to imagine that anybody could potentially disagree with their respective axioms. All people, all over the world—so their reasoning goes—must surely be in accord on these fundamental issues? In other words, the notions of ‘other living beings’ (i.e. animals, plants, and so forth) and ‘other people’ (i.e. foreigners, people from a different society, and so forth) are taken to be ahistorical and transcultural. Social anthropology for one is thus pervaded by an unrecognized universalism.

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Here we touch upon a profound misunderstanding that has plagued anthropology since its very beginning. For if there are two strange beliefs that an animist would never buy into then it is exactly those two—‘other living beings’ and ‘other humans’—and I insist that they are beliefs and that they are much more exotic than commonly acknowledged. In what follows I demonstrate that the single most important characteristic of animism is precisely the fact that its adherents *do* question these supposedly unquestionable fundamentals, which, as will be shown in some depth, also happen to be among the foremost conceptual cornerstones of modern biology and modern anthropology. This study suggests that animism offers something much more ingenious than many of its ethnographers have fathomed so far. Various contemporary authors have indicated that grasping this ingenuity requires a bit of a sea change in the way so-called indigenous people are described and understood. The aim of the book is to contribute to that incipient intellectual transformation and thus to get animism out of the narrow field of religious studies wherein it has been enclosed far too long. A first step is to recognize that animism is a worldwide phenomenon of remarkable coherence. As Philippe Descola has pointed out recently, this coherence remains imperceptible if one gets too entangled in the little obsessions, peculiar vocabularies, and pet-theories that hold sway in any given ethnographic region.³

That is not to say that I pretend to be entirely free of any kind of regional bias. In fact, I am very lucky that I have been groomed in the particularly flourishing subfield of South American anthropology. More specifically, I have been trained in its Anglophone variant. At the risk of being perceived as an inveterate name-dropper I will be upfront: Laura Rival, Elizabeth Ewart, Emilia Ferraro, Peter Gow, Neil Whitehead, Michael Heckenberger, Fernando Santos-Granero, Beth Conklin, Suzanne Oakdale, William Ballée, Dan Rosengren, Loretta Cormier, Jonathan Hill, and Robin Wright are among those who influenced my research a great deal, as are the pioneering scholars of an earlier generation—Peter Rivière, Joanna Overing, Christine and Stephen Hugh-Jones, Anthony Seeger, Terence Turner, and Kenneth Kensinger. Although this study is rooted in British social anthropology, it has a distinctly French flavour—some might even speak of a structuralist flavour, a characterisation I take as a compliment rather than as an insult. The work of Philippe Descola, whom I just mentioned, has been a primary source of inspiration—especially his programme of identifying what he refers to as ‘anthropological invariants’. I am aware that many of my Anglophone colleagues are somewhat sceptical about this programme and hope that the present study of animistic notions of humanity and life—which I see as prime examples of such invariants—goes some way to convince them of its untapped potential. Other anthropologists based and/or trained in France who have exercised significant influence over this project are Philippe Erikson, Jean-Pierre Chaumeil, Anne-Christine Taylor, Montserrat Ventura, and Armelle Lorcy.

I have also been greatly stimulated by the Brazilian school of Amazonian anthropology, of which Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, Aparecida Vilaça, Tania Stolze Lima, and Carlos Fausto are among the best known representatives. However, my specific take on animism has not solely been shaped by South America specialists. Given his sustained interest in formulating the question of life from an anthropological angle and in criticizing a certain biological *pensée unique*, Tim Ingold is naturally a key reference. Although I develop the idea in a rather different way, I could not have written this book without his crucial insight that life must not necessarily be grasped as an inherent property of things. Other writers at the forefront of contemporary research on animism in the northern circumpolar region and elsewhere include Roberte Hamayon, Rane Willerslev, Morten Pedersen, Nurit Bird-David, Lorraine Aragon, Kuel Jok, Grégory Delaplace, and Graham Harvey. All these authors—and a selection of some of their most relevant works can be found in the bibliography—have tackled the theme in innovative ways and it is one of my great frustrations that, within the limits of this book, I cannot engage more directly with some of the exciting theoretical pathways they have opened.

My dogged concentration on a few of the invariant aspects of animism follows from an earlier personal obsession with metamorphosis (the topic of my doctoral research), a phenomenon whose widespread geographical and temporal occurrence—from Ancient Greece to present day Amazonia, for example—has never been satisfactorily explained in my view. Whereas the strong regional orientation of social anthropology (i.e. regionally specialized university departments, conferences, and journals) certainly has its merits, I think it may be ineffective when it comes to resolving this kind of global, long-term puzzle. That is why I support the development of a broader, supra-regional comparative framework—an approach that has also been advocated by Marc Brightman, Vanessa Grotti, and Olga Ulturgasheva in a recent volume they edited on the parallels between Siberian and Amazonian forms of animism.

A comprehensive project such as this one is admittedly somewhat controversial. Worldwide comparison was popular in the late 19th and early 20th century, but contemporary writers generally agree that it never led anywhere beyond unwarranted generalisations, half-baked theories, and obvious truisms. Social anthropologists, in particular, shy away from such inclusive approaches on the grounds that they are overly coarse and bound to ignore historical specificities and cultural contexts.⁴ Such objections may be legitimate, but does this necessarily imply that any attempt to compare beyond a particular ethnographic region is necessarily doomed? The grandiose comparisons of anthropology's founders may have been clumsy and brash (although it is no doubt too facile to say this speaking with hindsight) but the conditions have significantly changed since those early days. For one thing, the sheer quantity of available ethnography has grown exponentially. As the discipline matured, the average quality of

6 *Animism and the Question of Life*

published works has arguably improved as well. Anthropology has come a long way since Tylor complained about ‘the miserably imperfect data now accessible’.⁵ For those willing to hazard large-scale comparison, the circumstances have altogether never been so propitious.

In the first instance, I focus on the Chachi, a designation which refers to approximately nine thousand Amerindian people who mostly reside in the coastal province of Esmeraldas, in Ecuador, South America. The reason why these people enjoy pride of place has everything to do with my own first-hand experience. In a period stretching from 2003 to 2005 I conducted eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in Esmeraldas, followed by a shorter one-month stint in 2008. Most of the time I lived in two Chachi villages adjoining the Cotacachi-Cayapas nature reserve, but I also spent a great deal of time in the provincial capital, where various Chachi families have settled. Whereas this study is primarily based on my own research material, it also draws extensively on a relatively small but geographically wide-ranging selection of other ethnographies. I will compare Chachi and other forms of animism in the Americas and elsewhere, especially in southern Asia and eastern Africa. More specifically, I focus on the Wari’ and the Matis of Amazonia, the Navajo and the Lakota of North America, the Yup’ik and the Ainu of the Northern Pacific Rim, the Chewong and the Batek of the Malay Peninsula, the Ongee of the Andaman Islands, the Uduk of the Sudan-Ethiopian borderlands, and the Samburu and the Maasai of the East African Rift.

To be clear, I state at the outset that I am not primarily interested in providing an accurate portrayal of the present-day situation of the various so-called indigenous societies I have included in the comparison—that is something that their respective ethnographers have achieved with much more verve than I could ever aspire to do. I readily acknowledge that many people in those societies have lifestyles that are different—sometimes radically different—from the animistic ones I highlight throughout this book. But my choice to focus on some of the invariant aspects of animism is not a surreptitious attempt to prove that these societies are frozen in time, a common delusion that many of my colleagues have rightfully denounced. In fact, I do not believe that ‘they’ are very different from ‘us’ at all. I rather see animism as a common human heritage, which some people—such as the Chachi—happen to have taken better care of than others. In how far that heritage is, in the present day and age, a living heritage is a matter of contention. Crudely speaking, there is a pessimistic and an optimistic camp: whereas the former views its diverse expressions as the last remnants of a disappearing world, the latter sees animism as a much more resilient phenomenon, capable of adapting to contemporary circumstances through its own modes of discovery and innovation. Although I count myself among those who are cautiously optimistic, the aim of this book is not to establish which side is right. If it turns out that the animistic world is really a world on the wane, as Claude Lévi-Strauss famously declared in one of his more

gloomy moments, the present study still has some kind of historical value insofar as it documents that shared but all too often neglected heritage.

Crucially, I honour the dictum that an interesting comparison is one that aspires to subvert the conceptual framework of the one who compares. Rather than classifying or interpreting exotic cosmologies, I seek to present the findings in such a way that the exoticism of the reader's own cosmology transpires. More specifically, I scrutinize how the question of life is formulated in the Western cosmology—that is, the modern worldview where 'nature' is posited as the ultimate reality and where 'science' is the privileged way to apprehend that reality. It is perhaps good to signal in advance that I use this expression—that of a Western or modern cosmology—quite liberally throughout the book. And I use it in a specific and perhaps somewhat idiosyncratic sense, namely as the peculiar cosmology whose adherents believe in the ideas of 'other humans' and 'other living beings'. These two key ideas—which as I already indicated are stranger than generally thought—are primarily promoted by two of its main offshoots, which I refer to as modern anthropology and modern biology. So for my purposes here modern anthropology is the official academic apparatus that supports the idea of 'other humans', whereas modern biology does the same for 'other living beings'. How this exactly happens will emerge as we proceed. For now I just wish to emphasize that the aim of this study is not to critique or morally evaluate the Western cosmology, although I confess I am not strong-willed enough to resist the occasional temptation to use it as a convenient punching bag.

The question of life is a perennial problem that has puzzled philosophers since Antiquity. In the Western tradition, it has been posed in a variety of ways but three concepts—each of which is associated with a famous philosopher—are generally envisaged as a common legacy: life as animation (Aristotle), life as mechanism (Descartes), and life as organization (Kant).⁶ In the present day and age, it may appear as if a definitive answer to the question of life is within reach. The modern life sciences have acquired an unprecedented sophistication—think of evolutionary theory, genetics, or palaeontology, which currently offers a fairly precise picture of the Earth's organic past. In the second half of the 20th century, it was widely believed that the discovery of the double helix structure of the DNA molecule amounted to the discovery of 'the secret of life' (in fact, many still believe this today). To ask 'What is life?' then became stigmatized as old-fashioned and inappropriate as it was thought to imply a rejection of the achievements of molecular biology. But as Michel Morange recently remarked, things have begun to change: 'Fewer and fewer scientists are convinced that we have a complete answer. The question has once again become respectable, and it now lies at the heart of research being carried out by a great many biologists and other scientists in a wide range of fields.'⁷

The limits of the question of life continue to shift and expand: in time, in space, in terms of diversity, with regard to the interface between the

organic and the inert, and also with regard to artificial life. Think of current research on the origins of life, the field known as astrobiology, research on so-called extremophiles (organisms that inhabit 'extreme' environments such as geysers or volcanic vents on the seafloor), investigations into the status of such things as viruses or even the Earth as a whole, and attempts to manufacture life-like robots.⁸ Notwithstanding the sometimes dazzling advances in these burgeoning fields, I would suggest that the question of life, as posed in such contemporary sciences, has become unnecessarily secluded. The variety of approaches that currently hold sway—biochemical, genetic, cellular, developmental, ecological, evolutionary—may have created a false impression of comprehensiveness and reasonableness. My proposal is to reformulate the question of life in a manner that completely shakes off the premises of the biological framework wherein it has gotten entrapped. The answers given would thus become more sensible and more accessible at the same time. This may seem like a heroic task, ridiculously ambitious at best and hyperbolically pretentious at worst.

Your scepticism is justified, but I would like to counter it by underlining that there is nothing particularly impressive or innovative about such an endeavour. In fact, the reformulation I intend to explicate already exists and has in all likelihood existed for a very long time. It is just that it has only rarely been given its proper due. The reasons for this neglect will become clearer soon, but I can already say it is related to the fact that the more sensible formulation I just referred to is particularly prevalent among people who would normally shun the limelight—in the anthropological literature they are conventionally designated as animists. So I do not pretend to carve out an entirely new field of investigation single-handedly. All I will do is to tap into something that others have already worked out with admirable consistency but which never got the full attention it deserves on the broader stage of contemporary science. As a result, the question of life will be posed in a manner that will no doubt strike many readers as surprisingly approachable.

My account is one about the arts of secretive courtship and beautiful speech, about tattooing one's face and applying clay paint to one's body in order to protect it from the winds, about harpooning seals and crafting curled shavings from willow sticks, about brewing beer and the importance of moving one's pipe in circles. It is *not*—as one may expect in an academic study on the question of life—about new insights from molecular biology, complicated biochemical experiments, sophisticated computer models, or high-tech microscopes. I do *not* talk about chaos theory or self-organizing systems. Rather than working on an infinitely small scale (DNA, proteins, cells) or an infinitely large scale (ecology of the biosphere, evolution of species)—a curious and wholly unstudied obsession of the great majority of modern scientists—I will be working on a much more accessible, 'human' scale. The latter approach, it should be stressed, is not in any way less apt to deal with the problem than the former. Many contemporary scientists seem to believe that the 'ultimate truth' surely must be difficult

to grasp—hence their widespread enthusiasm for building intricate instruments that are purported to provide privileged access to it. By contrast, this study aims to debunk the myth that if something is not highly technical or deeply specialized, it is not proper science.

Ultimately, the central goal of the book is to examine the relationship between biology and animism. More specifically, I wish to draw attention to a curious feature of the Western cosmology: its adherents' unfaltering belief that the science of biology and the various forms of animism that have been documented among so-called indigenous people are not on a par. The former is supposed to describe life as it really is, whereas the latter are relegated to the level of social constructions or cultural perceptions. Animists allegedly see the phenomena of life through a glass darkly. Biology is deemed truthful, exact, and objective. By contrast, animism is envisaged as biased, approximate, and subjective. In this bifurcated framework natural scientists have effectively monopolized the quest for knowledge about life. Animism has been side-lined. The anthropologists who study it can—supposedly—only do pronouncements on how life is represented but not on its factual underpinnings. Biologists can safely ignore the findings of social anthropologists because the latter are allegedly only dealing with symbolic approximations of a deeper truth.

One cannot fail to note that this *a priori* division between relativism and universalism, or culture and nature, implies a distinctive hypocrisy. On the one hand, so-called indigenous people are viewed sympathetically. 'We can learn a lot from you' is the phrase that is repeated time and again. On the other hand, one notices that 'their' animism is only taken seriously up to a certain point; it is not allowed to affect 'our' science in the slightest. Only 'we', or at least 'our' scientists, are capable of apprehending nature as it really is. So-called indigenous people and all those qualified as non-modern or non-rational are banned from the front stage by default, however much they are treated with ostentatious deference. That only biologists are thought to be properly equipped to deal with the question of life is one notable example of this thinly veiled sense of superiority. A principal aim of this book is to challenge that prerogative.

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Part I

Restricted Life

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1 Humans

Us, the Human Beings, the Living Ones

I propose [. . .] to study the animism of the world so far as it constitutes, as unquestionably it does constitute, an ancient and world-wide philosophy.

—Edward B. Tylor (2010a [1871]: 386)

In this chapter ‘indigenous’ notions of humanity and life are documented and contrasted with approaches based on modern science. What emerges is that the former are surprisingly uniform all over the world. It also transpires that contemporary anthropologists pose the question of humanity in a very peculiar way, just as biologists pose the question of life in a very peculiar way.

Humans are the core business of anthropology. The very name of the discipline indicates this: it derives from the Greek *anthropos*, human being, and *logos*, reason. But who qualifies as a ‘human being’, exactly? In modern anthropology, the question is deemed superfluous—whether somebody does or does not pertain to humanity is assumed to be obvious. And anthropologists tend to suppose that this self-evidence is recognized universally, by people all over the world. To be sure, there is no shortage of ethnographic evidence that—apparently—supports this conviction. Consider the following example. One evening, the Chachi school-inspector Adalberto Añapa Cimarron looked up from his newspaper and told me:

‘Can you imagine, according to this report there are now six billion Chachi in the world!’

We were sitting in his house in *el tercer piso*, one of the poorer neighbourhoods of Esmeraldas, a small town on the Pacific coast of Ecuador. What struck me in this phrase was not so much the estimation of some demographer cited in the newspaper, as Adalberto’s curious use of the term ‘Chachi’. Until then, I had only heard it used with regard to the specific Amerindian group of approximately nine thousand people among whom I had been doing ethnographic research. I had always assumed that ‘Chachi’ was simply the name of a particular kind of ‘indigenous people’. Noticing my confusion, Adalberto explained that it can be used in a wider sense as well. All the people in the world, he insisted, could be considered ‘Chachi’: ‘Tsachila, Epera, Blacks, Quichua, Hispanics, Gringos . . . all are Chachi. It is not just the Chachi in our own community that can be designated as such’.

At first sight, Adalberto’s remarks confirm the universality of the concept of an incontrovertible, unified humanity. Indeed, what people such as the

Chachi say seems to establish the 'obviousness' of the anthropological notion of a singular human species rather firmly. With regards to humanity, Westerners and those traditionally portrayed as non-Westerners—i.e. anthropologists and so-called indigenous people—appear to march in perfect unison. But can one take for granted that this has always been the case?

Adalberto, for one, was quick to add that this specific usage of 'Chachi' was fairly recent. In his view, it coincided with the emergence of the bilingual education system during the 1970s. In *Cha'palaa*, the vernacular language, there is no original term for 'the human species' as it is conceived of in modern anthropology. The notion only emerged when people began to learn Spanish. Adalberto, himself a pioneering bilingual teacher, then explained how 'Chachi' was used in the past:

Formerly, 'Chachi' had a very narrow meaning; it uniquely referred to those who shared our language and lived like us. Quichua Indians from the highlands, Blacks from the coast, and city-dwelling Hispanics were not considered Chachi. In fact, the latter were not considered proper humans. 'Chachi' literally means 'humans' [*gente* in local Spanish] or 'true humans' [*gente verdadero*]. Therefore, when we said that somebody was not Chachi, this amounted to saying that he or she was not really human. Moreover, you should not think that this specific usage is merely something of the past: along the river Cayapas and elsewhere in the countryside it is still quite widespread, even among those who regularly visit cities.

This particular conception of humanity is by no means unique to the Chachi—in what follows I will develop the argument that it is a cornerstone of animism in general. Amerindians and other so-called indigenous people fairly consistently refer to themselves in terms that are often translated as 'the people', 'the real people', 'true persons', or 'us, the human beings', implying that those unlike 'us' are not truly human. In *Race et histoire*, Claude Lévi-Strauss did already describe this phenomenon; in the anthropological literature it is often referred to as the 'ethnocentric attitude' of small-scale societies.¹ More recently, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro has suggested that expressions such as 'the human beings' operate pragmatically (and possibly also syntactically) as pronouns that mark the position of the enunciator rather than as substantives.² According to him, this would explain why indigenous categories of collective identity so often have a great contextual variability, which is also characteristic of pronouns. Their contemporary fixation as 'ethnonyms' is in this view an artefact of the interaction with colonizers, travellers, missionaries, and ethnographers.

Here I will develop this line of reasoning in a somewhat different direction. It is true that terms such as 'Chachi' may designate something that many Chachi people nowadays understand as 'a society', 'a culture', 'an ethnic community', or 'an indigenous tribe'. Yet, this kind of understanding is

of relatively recent coinage; it is in most cases a colonial legacy. Terms such as 'Chachi' originally did not refer to some people or to a specific group of people but to *all* people. That is, they used to designate humanity *as a whole*. Or—to use an alternative formulation that will be fully explained further on—they did not refer to some living beings or to a specific group of living beings but to life *as a whole*. Of course, this humanity and this life do not exactly overlap with the anthropological notion of humanity and the biological notion of life promoted by the practitioners of modern science. Insofar as only members of one's own group are deemed human, we are dealing with what one could call a restricted humanity. Insofar as only members of one's own group are deemed alive, we are dealing with a restricted life. Strictly speaking, 'Chachi' is not (or at least did not use to be) an ethnonym; it must rather be grasped as something like 'us, the human beings' or 'us, the living ones'. But my argument does not just concern the Chachi.

In fact, I tentatively suggest that a restricted humanity and a restricted life are (or at least used to be) common among so-called indigenous people all over the world. The argument I develop throughout the book is that this restrictedness is a central if not the foremost feature of animism. Although this kind of statement may sound inordinately sweeping to the ears of social anthropologists, I stand by my claim: far from being limited to one ethnographic area in South America, the notions of restricted humanity and restricted life are much more widespread than usually realized. What is more, their basic characteristics are surprisingly stable. As I hope to show in what follows, they recur in a great variety of cultural and historical contexts with astonishing regularity.

But first it is necessary to introduce a few formalities. To mark the difference between the animistic notion of humanity and the modern anthropological idea of humanity I will consistently capitalize the restricted humanity described by Adalberto in the last quote: from now onwards, this becomes 'Humanity'. The anthropological notion of humanity, in contrast, will be kept in lower case. Whereas the latter always denotes a relatively stable ontological category, Humanity does not, as we shall see in great depth further onwards: I will refer to it as a *shape*. Similarly, I will systematically use capital letters when I speak of restricted life: from now onwards, this becomes 'Life'. The modern biological notion of life, in contrast, will be kept in lower case. Unlike the latter, the animistic Life is not a fixed ontological category. Just like Humanity, I will refer to Life as a *shape*. For our purposes here, the key difference between a category and a shape is that whereas the former is given, the latter must always be maintained continuously.

These ad hoc conventions will make apparent that the way in which contemporary anthropologists formulate the question of humanity is strikingly similar to the way in which contemporary biologists formulate the question of life. As far as I know, the present study is the first one that explores this intriguing similarity in some detail. These conventions will also enable

me to demonstrate that this manner of formulating those respective questions is far from self-evident but, rather, peculiar to a distinctly Western (and hence ultimately parochial) cosmology. In this chapter, I will mainly concentrate on the notion of Humanity. The parallel notion of Life will be developed more gradually over the next few chapters.

A READYMADE HUMANITY VERSUS HUMANITY AS A SPECIFIC EFFORT

Within the Western cosmology humanity is considered a given. No exam must be passed to count as human, no forms have to be filled out, and no trial period is required. According to modern anthropology there are no terms and conditions whatsoever: all one needs to do is to be born as a human being. Indeed, this anthropological humanity can poignantly be characterized as *effortless*—it always comes readymade. In a similar vein, life is considered a given in all contemporary scientific approaches. The status of ‘living being’ is attributed to this, that, and the other without any specific conditions. All one needs to do is ‘to be alive’. Life, in its modern biological conception, can be described as readymade too. Many of us (and I include myself) are so inculcated by the tenets of this Western cosmology that we can hardly imagine that somebody would not readily accept these anthropological and biological axioms as self-evident. And yet, a small but not unimportant minority has never taken them very seriously. Who are these sceptics?

Well, they are to be found among those who have always constituted anthropology’s favourite subject of enquiry, namely ‘indigenous people’. More precisely, they are to be found among those who have traditionally been subsumed under the heading of animism. Even though the latter is a very loaded term, I will co-opt it to refer to a certain attitude of recalcitrance vis-à-vis the Western cosmology. Of course I am aware that this recalcitrant attitude is by no means omnipresent among contemporary indigenous people, many of whom wholeheartedly embrace the possibilities of modern science (by getting a university degree in medicine, for example, as one of my Chachi friends did). In fact, animism may not even be particularly prevalent in the present day and age. Yet I do not apologize for focussing on it almost exclusively. My portrayal of so-called indigenous people as defiant nonconformists may be somewhat idiosyncratic but then again I never pretend to deliver a perfectly truthful ethnography or a fully realistic account of indigenous group X or Y, whatever that may be. I begin my inquiry with the Chachi of Esmeraldas, who I have already introduced to you. For reasons that will become clear, I first take a closer look at their courtship practices:

Finding a girlfriend was not easy in the old days. Boys and girls were not supposed to talk to each other and even looking at the opposite sex

was forbidden. Adolescent girls were rigorously guarded at all times. Their fathers kept a close eye on them, never allowing them to be on their own outside the house. If a girl went to the river or forest, she was always accompanied by at least one relative. 'When I was an adolescent,' one elderly man recalled, 'morality was very strict and monogamy was the rule. If you were caught speaking to or even just smiling at a girl, you were immediately obliged to marry her.' Casual meetings were nearly impossible, as people did not live in villages at the time. Villages only appeared with the introduction of bilingual education, that is, in the past 25 years. The Chachi used to live apart, in separate houses located at certain intervals along the river. Approaching the girl you fancied required patience and cunning. Usually, the lover had to wait until it was dark and everybody in her house was asleep. Meticulous preparation was essential. He had to know exactly on which mat she slept and where her mosquito net was located. Without light, he had to tiptoe towards her, carefully avoiding any noise. Once inside the net he had to wake the girl gently, so that she would not be frightened. Then, the lovers could whisper in each other's ear and get to know each other better. Clearly, such undertakings were quite risky. If somebody slept in a different spot than usual, the intruder could stumble over that person and the whole house would be alarmed. The father of the girl often had a machete close at hand and would not hesitate to go after the uninvited guest. One constantly had to remain vigilant, ready to flee when necessary. Elders know plenty of anecdotes about such amorous adventures gone wrong. Thus, there is the hilarious story of a young man who sneaked into the mosquito net of his girlfriend, but found himself in the arms of her father, who had grown suspicious and swapped places with his daughter . . . [personal fieldnotes]

Before anything else, I remark that such elderly men's stories no doubt downplay the active role of the female lovers; girls surely did more than simply lie and wait for their boyfriends. Even so, the account clearly illustrates that Chachi people deemed flirting before marriage unacceptable. Much has changed today, especially for male adolescents who are mostly bilingual and can travel to the town of Esmeraldas and other cities pretty easily, something that was not possible two generations ago when today's elders were young and there was no public transport system. Nevertheless, a very strong general sense that the Chachi are somehow more virtuous than neighbouring populations continues to exist. Chachi courtship remains a strikingly secretive affair, especially in comparison to what happens among Hispanics, where machismo reigns and boasting about one's sexual prowess tends to be the norm, at least among young men.

Above all, marriage is taken very seriously. Its great importance is reflected in the fact that Chachi people spare no effort to organize sumptuous wedding festivals.³ A key aspect is that husband and wife are supposed

to remain absolutely faithful until death separates them. Up until today this emphasis on strict monogamy is no laughing matter. Divorce, adultery, and polygamy are considered among the vilest mistakes thinkable. They are what Chachi call *ujcha*, a word ethnographers imperfectly translate as 'sins'. Besides strict monogamy, marriage entails strict endogamy: if you are Chachi, you are supposed to marry another Chachi. Outsiders are excluded. This emphasis on 'proper marriage', with everything it entails—the chastity of young girls, monogamy, endogamy, and so forth—constitutes a privileged criterion to demarcate those who are Chachi from those who are not. Blacks (*peechulla*), Indians from the highlands (*eyula*), and Whites (*uyala*) are considered much more easy-going when it comes to marital life, an attitude many Chachi deem inappropriate, not to say scandalous. In the end, the key point is that these specific practices of courtship and marriage are central aspects of what Chachi refer to as *ura'chunu*, 'living well'.

Another crucial element is that one should be 'worthy' (*bale*). In the case of men, this mainly refers to canoe crafting, hunting, and fishing with spears. As for women, it primarily pertains to weaving, gardening, and child rearing. To be sure, 'worthy work' and 'proper marriage' interlink to a considerable extent, for only good workers are deemed acceptable marriage partners. At least, that is the classic ideal. Strikingly, Chachi people appear to be quite confident about their own worthiness. This becomes especially evident in situations where they compare themselves to outsiders, who are often designated as *eyu*, 'clumsy'. Let us focus, for a moment, on what is no doubt their most iconic practice.

In the whole of Ecuador, the Chachi are renowned as skilful canoe-crafters. Along the river Cayapas and its tributaries life without canoes would simply be inconceivable. All traffic in the area goes via the stream. There are no roads and footpaths between villages are rarely used. Canoes are the principal means of transport for men and women alike. Constructing a good canoe requires considerable effort. The first step is locating a suitable tree, preferably *guadaripo* or *pulgande*. Such trees are relatively rare and one usually needs to look for them at some distance from the village. As soon as the trunk is cut the crafter and his assistant (usually a young relative) begin to hollow it out with their axes. This is the most tiresome part of the job and may take several days. The canoe is then brought into shape with an adze, an inwardly curved metal tool. To finish it off, the sides are polished with a plane. This may seem quite straightforward, but it is not. If done slovenly, the experienced canoeist immediately notices. When one of the sides is slightly thicker or thinner the equilibrium is disturbed, which is highly inconvenient as Chachi paddlers have the habit of standing upright. Owning a good canoe that can be manoeuvred with accuracy is the pride of any decent man and being seen in a rotten one is always a bit shameful. [personal fieldnotes]

A mature man who cannot craft a canoe is often scornfully stigmatised as 'worthless' (*balejtu*). The same goes for those who are inept hunters or fishers. Just like competence in using an axe, handling shotguns or fishing spears skilfully is a matter of pride. Using traps, as the Blacks do, is looked down upon, even though some confess they occasionally use them. 'But then we try to do it in secret,' one man told me, 'otherwise we would be criticised for behaving like a Black.' I wish to emphasize again that Chachi people consistently depict themselves as competent workers. 'We Chachi', it is always said, 'know how to live well. We have the aptitude to handle axes and make canoes; we are capable hunters and fishers.'

At this point, it is useful to widen our perspective a little. Adherents of the Western cosmology normally presuppose that those who are born as Chachi don't have to do anything specific to maintain that status. In other words, their Chachi-ness is assumed to be an unshakable given. Sure enough, they would admit that there is a proper way of doing things—'living well'—but if people do wrong they simply 'sin'. Such wrongdoers are supposed to be 'sinful humans'; their humanity itself is never put in doubt. Somebody may have as many girlfriends he likes, cheat on his wife, and indulge in all kinds of polygamous experiments, but none of this jeopardizes his status as a Chachi. The Western cosmology is also built on the premise that there is such a thing as 'other people'. Those who are not Chachi—Blacks, Highland Indians, Whites—are all, without further enquiries or formalities, attributed the status of 'humans', albeit 'other humans'. That all these non-Chachi have no clue about how to live properly and engage in all kinds of scandalous practices, as we have seen, is discarded as irrelevant. In the Western cosmology skill is not an existential issue: there are skilled humans and those who are not are simply 'unskilled humans'. Being incompetent may be painful but one's condition as a human being is never put in doubt. Clumsiness has no bearing on one's ontological status. Even if you are the most bungling canoe crafter or fish with traps instead of spears you can rest assured—because you were born as a Chachi, you will always remain a Chachi. No blunder or faux pas can endanger your humanity—no specific skill is required to maintain it. As mentioned before, adherents of the Western cosmology propagate the idea of a humanity that comes for free, with a life-long warrant: an *effortless* humanity.

Three unconventional anthropologists, all Amazonia-experts, have challenged this conception of humanity or, at least, have shown that it is far from universal. In 1979 Anthony Seeger, Roberto da Matta, and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro formulated the ground-breaking idea that people are 'made' or 'fabricated'. More specifically, they grasped the salience of corporal practices in Amerindian societies—bodies require incessant attention. Viveiros de Castro has put it thus in a subsequent publication: 'It is important to note that these Amerindian bodies are not thought of as given but rather as made. Therefore an emphasis on the methods for the continuous fabrication of the body; a notion of kinship as a process of active

assimilation of individuals through the sharing of bodily substances, sexual and alimentary—and not as a passive inheritance of some substantial essence. . . .²⁴ These seminal views have been vindicated by most contemporary ethnographers who work in the region. In Amazonian anthropology it is now commonplace to say that human bodies are always works-in-progress that depend on the sustained maintenance of specific forms of commensality and conviviality. I would add that the gist of this insight is that Amazonian Indians never take humanity for granted. Being human—being ‘one of us’—is not so much a safe premise as a never-ending effort that has to be kept up through the continuous sharing of food, the gradual acquisition of bodily ornaments, and much else. I claim that this also applies to the Chachi whom—it should be remembered—are not Amazonian but inhabit a rainforest area along the Pacific coast of Ecuador, west of the Andes.

The idiom of ‘living well’, I suggest, is nothing else than the Chachi’s particular way of expressing the very widespread idea—possibly universal among all so-called indigenous people—that ‘humans are made’. Monogamy and crafting canoes are not things you simply add on a pre-existing human being. Rather than optional extras, they are indispensable preconditions to qualify as such. In this context Chachi-ness is not an indisputable given, but an on-going fabrication; it is not a safe status but rather something that requires perpetual maintenance. To qualify as Chachi one must ‘live well’ at all times, one’s conduct must always be that of a properly married spouse and a worthy worker. The term ‘Chachi’, then, does not refer to ‘humans’ as a class or a category but to ‘humans in the making’ or Humans—for we are talking about what I have proposed to call a *shape*. We are not dealing with a humanity that comes for free but with a Humanity that has to be earned and upheld at all times. Unlike those indoctrinated by the Western cosmology, Chachi animists would never be so naïve as to believe that anything comes for free. They know that *Humanity always requires a specific effort*. In other words, *keeping in shape* is essential.

To conclude this section, I wish to highlight a feature of Humanity that may appear contradictory at first sight. On the one hand, there are considerable restrictions as to who meets the requirements. Men who cheat on their wife or women who have illicit affairs do not qualify as Chachi. The same goes for those who are clueless about canoe crafting, hunting, or spear-fishing. Strictly speaking, such adulterous or worthless individuals are *not* Humans. Sleeping around or incompetent conduct is simply not an option; hence the vehement, consistently repeated denials that such things ever occur among Chachi. This is not a matter of chauvinism or lack of self-criticism. Rather, it originates from a logical impossibility: adultery and clumsiness are inconceivable insofar as those who engage in such behaviour are excluded from Humanity by default.

Yet, Humanity remains open to all individuals who are willing to put in the appropriate effort. Here I should briefly mention those who are commonly referred to as ‘neighbouring peoples’, ‘outsiders’, ‘foreigners’, or

more generally, ‘other people’: Tsachila, A’wa, Blacks, Quichua, Hispanics, Gringos, and so forth. (This matter will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter). For now it is enough to make the provisional statement that all of them are potentially Human. Yet, their inclusion within Humanity is always conditional. Much hinges on their commitment to a monogamous lifestyle and on their willingness to develop highly valued skills such as canoe crafting. In sum, a key feature of Humanity as shape is that it is simultaneously restricted and open. Much more can be said about Humanity, but I now wish to broaden the scope of the enquiry and will examine in how far that notion is useful beyond the particular ethnographic context discussed so far.

COMPARING ANIMISTIC NOTIONS OF HUMANITY ACROSS THE WORLD

We have just seen that the expression Humanity is actually a shortened form for saying that humans are ‘made’ or ‘fabricated’, an idea originally developed in 1979 by three Amazonia-specialists. Hereafter, I will discuss various examples in some depth, starting with the Wari’ of western Amazonia. As a whole, this section constitutes a summary introduction to the various expressions of animism that will play a central role throughout the book.

Amazonia

The word *wari*’ literally means ‘we’, ‘persons’, ‘human beings’.⁵ Sometimes the expression *iri wari*’, ‘real humans’ or ‘true humans’, is used as a term of self-reference.⁶ Wari’ people used to concentrate on exploiting the resources of the interior forest, away from the larger rivers. Before the contact, they had no canoes and avoided fishing in deep water. Their farming practices also oriented them away from the bigger rivers, their principal staple being maize, which grows in upland gardens.⁷ Aparecida Vilaça underlines that ‘maize is more than a staple crop; it is an emblem of humanity’. She specifies: ‘Only human beings, *wari*’, know how to cultivate it and use it as a basic ingredient of their diet.’⁸ Fatty meat and unfermented maize *chicha* are the food that the Wari’ value most highly. Giving and accepting such items, Beth Conklin explains, expresses ‘kinship, amity, and social engagement, whereas refusing it can imply distancing or a negation of social ties.’⁹ She stresses that producing and sharing food, eating together, and engaging in conversation have always been at the core of Wari’ life. Her argument that shared body substance establishes kinship relations supports the more general idea that Humanity always requires a specific effort. Indeed, *wari*’ is best translated as ‘Humans’, and not as ‘humans’ in the modern anthropological sense. In order to qualify as a Human, one continuously has to conduct oneself as such, one must *keep in shape*. In the Wari’ case

this implied, among other things, living in the interior forest, hunting, and growing maize.

Significantly, the Wari's principal enemies (other Indians and the Brazilians and Bolivians who invaded their lands in search of rubber) did not inhabit the interior forest but tended to settle along bigger rivers. Their diet was not based on maize but on such items as rice, salt, and sugar. As such, they behaved in an ostentatiously non-Wari' way and were conceived of as nonhuman or, more exactly, non-Human. This illustrates the restrictedness of Humanity. The ethnographers quoted above stress the importance of commensality time and again. Those who eat together are said to become alike.¹⁰ Consider this:

It must be emphasized that the body is not conceived of as a genetic given, but is constructed throughout life by means of social relationships. Among the Wari', the body of the child continues to be fabricated after birth through alimentation and the exchange of body fluids with parents, siblings, and other near kin. Adopted children, for example, are considered consubstantial with their adoptive parents. Food is central to the constitution of physical identity. In the first phase of my fieldwork, I repeatedly heard exclamations of the type 'She isn't Wari', she doesn't eat grubs.' When I finally swallowed some of these grubs in front of them, the news spread through the village that I had turned completely Wari'.¹¹

In my opinion, such references to 'the body' can be replaced by the more comprehensive notion of Humanity. Vilaça's remark that the body is not a given but rather a continuous fabrication thus supports the contention that Humanity is a perpetual effort rather than a guaranteed status. We are speaking about shape, not identity. As long as the ethnographer refuses to eat grubs, she is not considered as 'one of us'. Indeed, we can infer that she is suspected to be non-Human, which once again exemplifies the restricted character of Humanity. However, her account also suggests that Humanity is fundamentally open. When she finally swallowed the grubs, people were no longer in doubt: she was truly Human. In sum, Vilaça's vocabulary may be different from mine, but in essence she hints at the same thing, namely the fact that Humanity is simultaneously restricted and open.

We now move to another but closely related form of animism. The Matis of the Javari basin in western Brazil refer to themselves as *matis kimo*, what has been translated as 'true humans', 'authentic humans', or 'the only veritable humans'. The term *matis* is nowadays used as the name of an ethnic group but Philippe Erikson points out that it originally simply signified 'human being'.¹² The principal question is: how does one qualify as such; what constitutes a human being in this case? Thanks to Erikson's detailed ethnography we can answer the question fairly precisely. A key factor is the gradual acquisition of ornaments such as earrings, labrets,

and nose piercings. Far from mere esthetical devices, such ornaments are 'quasi inseparable extensions' of those who wear them.¹³ When sleeping for instance, Matis people do not take them off. If they do lose an ornament by accident they are affected greatly, for such a mishap is experienced as akin to a mutilation. What is more, not to be ornamented properly is considered terribly 'asocial'. Babies receive their first ornaments on the day of their birth; in this manner, Erikson notes, they are 'humanized'.¹⁴ With age, the size, quantity, and quality of the adornments increases, culminating in a series of facial tattoos in early adulthood. Vigorous hunters and accomplished mothers are those who are most ornamented. In old age, however, one's adornment tends to decrease.

Yet again, we see that people are 'made' or 'fabricated'—in this case by means of ornamentation. I suggest that the term *matís* refers to Human shape rather than to humans as defined by modern anthropology. Besides ornamentation, other factors also play central roles. 'Having a walk' in the forest is often seen as the quintessential Matis activity. Constructing a house is particularly valued for men, and so is brewing for women. Generosity is another essential prerequisite to be considered Matis.¹⁵ Taken as a whole, these various aspects constitute the specific effort that the Matis version of Humanity requires. It is their particular way of *keeping in shape*. Again we notice that Humanity is restricted. Those who never 'go for a walk' in the forest, those who are too lazy to brew, those unable to build a house, those who are thrifty, and those who lack ornaments cannot be 'true humans'. But we also see that Humanity is fundamentally open. Erikson himself is the living proof that things are never beyond hope. By going for walks at every opportunity and by constructing his own house he relatively quickly managed to improve his initially rather low status, as testified by the fact that his hosts eventually referred to him as *matís*, Human.¹⁶

North America

The idea that humans are 'made' or 'fabricated' is usually taken to be an Amazonian or, at most, a South American peculiarity. In this section, I suggest that it can be encountered all across North America too. I will focus on two well-known forms of animism, that of the Navajo and that of the Sioux.

I start with the Navajo, who refer to themselves as *diné*, which has been translated as 'the people' or 'we, the people'. One ethnographer underlines that they used to envisage themselves as people to the exclusion of all others; within Navajo animism, the very idea of 'other people' was literally inconceivable.¹⁷ This apparent ethnocentrism was expressed in various ways. Among many other things, the Navajo have a penchant for cultivating corn. All ethnographers concur that this crop is especially valued, not to say exalted: for most Navajo people there exists no better and more beautiful thing in the world than corn; some even call it 'life itself'.¹⁸ According to myth, all people

originally sprang from corn ears and the elaborate ceremonial system is commonly conceptualized as a corn plant.¹⁹ Pollen is also something of an obsession. Associated with light, sunbeams, and fertility, pollen from flowers and pines are an emblem of happiness and prosperity; to wish somebody health and good luck, Navajo say 'may the trail be in pollen'.²⁰ In the vernacular, people refer to this blessed condition as *hózhó*, crudely translated as 'beauty'. Apart from beauty it also conveys a sense of goodness, well-being, industriousness, and harmonious kinship relations.²¹ Whether it is women weaving rugs or men making sand-paintings, one should always strive for beauty. More generally, 'One is admonished to walk in beauty, speak in beauty, act in beauty, sing in beauty and live in beauty. All things are to be made beautifully, and all activities are to be completed in beauty'.²² Gary Witherspoon insightfully notes that this kind of beauty is not 'out there' to be perceived by some passive viewer. It is first and foremost an act, something that requires perpetual creation and fabrication.²³ What matters is its making rather than its display. In sum, one can infer that growing corn, collecting pollen, and the never-ending pursuit of beauty more generally are essential in order to *keep in shape*. I suggest that these are key aspects of the specific effort required to be included within Humanity.

Speech and language are central too. Over the centuries, Navajo people have remained stubbornly monolingual. They have always avoided speaking English, Spanish, or any of the languages of neighbouring Amerindians.²⁴ The contrast with their neighbours who, like the Pueblo Indians, sometimes speak half a dozen languages fluently is striking. Not that the Navajo are particularly isolationist: throughout their history, they have incorporated all kinds of exotic elements such as painted pottery and certain weaving techniques. But when it came to learning a foreign language they always remained very reluctant. This stubbornness should not be interpreted as some kind of resistance against powerful outsiders, as some commentators predictably have done. Rather, it derives from the crucial importance attributed to beautiful speech, which is indeed the ultimate source of *hózhó*.²⁵ A human being is generically characterized as 'one who speaks'.²⁶ This condition is taken quite stringently: babies who cry but cannot speak and those who are deaf and dumb are not classified as equal to human beings. For Witherspoon this illustrates 'the tremendous emphasis Navajo place on language as a means of controlling the universe. It is through language that man acquires human status'.²⁷ In my own words, speaking the same language is a precondition to *keeping in shape* and hence to count as Human; those who do not speak beautifully—such as babies and the dumb—simply do not qualify as Human. However, it should be added that this restrictedness of Humanity does not preclude an age-old openness. One ethnographer gives the example of a 1680 rebellion during which many Pueblo Indians fled the area of Spanish domination and joined the Navajo: '[Many refugees] did not return to their homes, and became Navajos—in language, that is, the only clear-cut criterion of nationality'.²⁸

That is, the originally non-Human refugees eventually were 'made' into Humans; language is not so much the principal criterion of 'nationality' as of Humanity in Navajo animism.

I now turn to the Sioux, the native inhabitants of the plains and prairies of North America. They used to refer to themselves as *lakota* or *dakota*, which can be translated as 'the men', 'the people', or 'allies'.²⁹ Raymond DeMallie has shown that in the 19th century the term 'Lakota' designated all the Sioux, that is, all those related by common kinship and common language. Speaking the same language was a crucial criterion at the time. As DeMallie has put it, language was the Sioux's 'most important symbol of social identity' (in that respect they were not so different from the Navajo).³⁰ Those who did not speak it were called 'those related to as enemies'; they were outside the bounds of Sioux kinship and hence did not qualify as 'allies'—strictly speaking, they were not considered 'people'. Whereas kinship relations were an essential prerequisite for peaceful interaction, warfare and communication by sign language was the appropriate mode of interaction with enemies.³¹ However, this did not preclude the possibility of incorporation: 'For example, a woman captured from an enemy tribe and married by a Sioux man was considered Sioux once she learned to speak her captors' language.'³² In short, we are once again confronted with a Humanity that is simultaneously restricted and open.

Each Sioux family had its own circular tipi, with an equally circular fire-place located at the centre. Families were organized in 'tipi groups', which dispersed over the plains during the winter. In spring these groups began to merge in camps. Each camp, according to DeMallie, was conceived of as a great family, and the tipis comprising it were arranged in a circle on all ceremonial occasions. Around midsummer, large hoop-shaped camps assembled for the annual 'sun dance' (to be discussed in a subsequent chapter) and the concomitant communal buffalo hunt.³³ In contrast to the Navajo, the Sioux were neither into farming, nor into husbandry—with the exception of horses, which had been introduced by European immigrants. Hunting on the plains was their thing, especially hunting buffalo. It is not so surprising, then, that their core values were closely linked with how they perceived their favoured prey. Lakota women were supposed to be hospitable and generous, qualities they had observed in buffalo cows. Bornali Halder remarks that they often mentioned the latter's proclivity to adopt orphan calves and also were aware that certain birds would nest in the woolly fur between their horns. Likewise, Lakota men were expected to be brave and protective, a virtue associated with buffalo bulls. They had observed that the latter form a circle at night around the cows and their young as they sleep; they also realized that during snow blizzards bulls stand in a V-shaped shield facing the storm, thus providing shelter for cows and calves.³⁴

The Lakota's remarkable obsession with hoops and circles deserves special mention. DeMallie writes that 'within the circle all were relatives' and

he adds that this was true ‘from the intimacy of a single family’s tipi, to the camp circle, and finally to the broadest identity as Lakota or Dakota.’³⁵ Yet, the circle is more than a figure that merely embraces kinship. Not only the sun and the moon, but also the sky, the earth, and all that breathes was envisaged as ‘round like the body of a man’.³⁶ This ‘roundness’ relates all creatures and things; according to Halder it is the ‘key motif of Lakota philosophy’.³⁷ One Lakota man formulated it thus: ‘Everything [a Lakota] does is in a circle [because the world] always works in circles and everything tries to be round.’³⁸ That is why their tipis are circular and why the mouth of a pipe should always be moved about in a circle before it is smoked. In fact, this emphasis on circularity endures to the present day and underpins current Lakota environmental activism, as Halder’s ethnography beautifully illustrates. All this constitutes the particular effort required to count as a Lakota, that is, to *keep in shape* and qualify as Human. Within Sioux animism maintaining one’s Humanity first and foremost depended on common language and kinship, but also on one’s hospitality (women), one’s protective abilities (men), and on the perpetuation of roundness.

The Northern Pacific Rim

Next, I wish to introduce a form of animism that is prevalent in western Alaska and northeast Siberia, among people who refer to themselves as *yup’ik*. This term is derived from *yuk*, ‘human being’, and *pik*, ‘genuine, real’—literally, it means ‘real people’.³⁹ Both on the American and the Russian side, they are renowned as sea mammal hunters—they catch various species of seal, walrus, and beluga whales. Even though they are nowadays engaged in various alternative activities, the ocean remains a principal point of reference. Ann Fienup-Riordan has shown that Yup’ik people strongly insist on ‘making one’s path clear’. Young men were always encouraged to shovel snow and dispose of rubbish in order to make a pathway for the seals they would someday hunt. But the expression also refers to a more general idea, namely living according to ancestral rules. Those who follow a ‘clear path’, Fienup-Riordan explains, define themselves in opposition to the ‘careless, unregulated actions of non-natives’; their ordered way of life is contrasted with that of outsiders, who are generally deemed to live without respect.⁴⁰ In the words of one man: ‘In our way of expressing, traditionally, the Yupiit [plural of Yup’ik] have an adage saying that there are no other humans in the world. And this still holds true during this time now. . . .’⁴¹ Those who did not engage in a specific way of life principally based on sea mammal hunting, such as the reindeer-breeding Chukchi or the Moravian missionaries who worked among them at the end of the 19th century, were not ‘real people’. To rephrase this in my own terms: they were not Humans. If one recognizes that Humanity always requires a specific effort—what Yup’ik often refer to as ‘keeping one’s path clear’—this exclusion need not come as a surprise.

In Yup'ik animism missionaries and white visitors in general were referred to as the 'children of thunder'. Fienup-Riordan gives the following example: 'There was an old shaman at Napaskiak, who strongly preached against adopting the white man's teaching. His strong point was that the white people were the children of thunder—therefore were not really human.'⁴² Hence the title of her book, *The Real People and the Children of Thunder*, which—in my terms—could be rendered as 'Humans and non-Humans'. Her ethnography indicates that Humanity is not just restricted, but also quintessentially open. The following anecdote concerning Edith and John Kilbuck, a rather exceptional Moravian missionary couple, is telling in that respect:

In the fall of 1890 two white men travelled from the Yukon and told the missionaries that the 'natives farther up the river had talked so much about the "Kilbuchamuks" that they expected to meet another tribe, not known as yet. As the natives were only referring to those living about the mission station, they were disappointed.' Not only had John and Edith received Yup'ik names, but their own surname was used to designate the small missionary band in the manner of a unique subgroup of 'real people.'⁴³

In other words, the Kilbucks succeeded in what many of their colleague missionaries had failed: they had become Humans. Fienup-Riordan concludes: 'The [Yup'ik people] originally accepted John and Edith because of their ability to act in Yup'ik ways.'⁴⁴ Yet again, what ultimately matters is your conduct rather than any essential characteristic. In the end, one can never rest assured. Humanity is never guaranteed but has to be achieved perpetually; it is forever in the making.

Next, I briefly discuss the animism of the Ainu of Hokkaido, Japan. Their homeland is called *ainu moshir* in the vernacular, literally 'the land of humans', and also used to comprise the Kuriles and southern Sakhalin. They refer to themselves as *ainu*, usually translated as 'human being' or more succinctly—as 'us'.⁴⁵ According to Honda Katsuichi the term carries a sense of exaltation and elegance. Children were often told: 'However poor we may be, you must become a humanlike human', that is, a person of virtue.⁴⁶ My contention is that the term does not denote humans as understood within the framework of the Western cosmology but, rather, 'humans in continuous fabrication'—Humans. One may object that the word, just like most if not all self-designations of so-called indigenous peoples, must have had a long and complicated history that cannot be reduced to such a simple formula. Of course, this is true. For instance, it was avoided during the early 20th century as it had acquired a pejorative connotation, while increasing numbers of Ainu have taken pride in the appellation in recent years.⁴⁷ But such changing semantic fortunes do not preclude that 'Ainu' originally denoted a particular conduct rather than a fixed ethnic status. In other words, the term referred to a provisional shape that needs to be

upheld continuously rather than to a sturdy ontological category. Nowadays many Ainu are fully integrated into mainstream Japanese society, and their animism may be on the wane. However, we can say that the Ainu version of Humanity—their special way of *keeping in shape*—used to revolve and to some extent still revolves around hunting, crafting curled shavings from willow sticks (known as *inaw*), and, more generally, maintaining an overall attitude of generosity.

Hunting took place in the mountains and at sea. Among the most prestigious undertakings were the killing of bears with poisoned arrows and the harpooning of swordfish, which required the cooperation of several crews in dug-out canoes.⁴⁸ Perhaps more critical to Ainu subsistence were deer, which migrated to eastern Hokkaido every winter in search of food, and salmon, which moved upstream in the autumn to spawn. The crafting of curled shavings and carved sticks was a crucial activity, insofar that one early 20th century ethnographer wrote: ‘the first thing that would have struck a visitor on coming to [an Ainu village] would doubtless have been the large groups of whittled wands and [shaved sticks] with the skulls of various animals outside of the eastern end of each of the huts’.⁴⁹ Most often, these artefacts were made of willow, a tree of great significance within Ainu animism. According to Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney the shaved sticks had to be carved with precision and beauty, in the specific form of the deity for whom they were intended.⁵⁰ These deities or *kamuy*, as they are known in the vernacular, were always treated as distinguished visitors. Incarnated as animals, plants, or specific things, they were thought to make their bodies available for food, timber to construct houses, and so forth. Grateful for such precious gifts, the Ainu treated their visitors generously and offered them saké and curled shavings. The importance of receiving such visitors properly will be discussed in more depth later on.

At this point it is convenient to challenge a couple of lingering stereotypes concerning so-called indigenous peoples in general and the Ainu in particular. From what I just described one may get the impression that the Ainu constitute a homogenous whole that is more or less impervious to historical change. My emphasis on hunting and other supposedly authentic activities could be taken to reinforce this image. Let there be no mistake: this idea of a society ‘out of time’—what is sometimes called a cold society—is seriously flawed. David L. Howell stresses that whereas Hokkaido is nowadays seen as the frontier of Japan, it used to be a centre in its own right, ‘the focus of trade routes that extended along the Japan Sea coast from central Honshu to Hokkaido, Sakhalin and the Amur river basin of north-eastern China and across the sea to Korea.’⁵¹ From the 14th century onwards, coastal Ainu communities navigated the adjoining seas and even the North Pacific in small sailing craft and forged commercial relations that stretched as far as the Kamchatka Peninsula. Brett L. Walker is emphatic: ‘This maritime trade, like hunting and fishing, was woven into the fabric of their culture.’⁵² Ainu traders exported fish products, deer pelts, and sea cucumber, among other things.

In the 17th century supplying hawks for falconry—a highly prestigious activity among the warrior elite of the Edo shogunate—had developed into a major industry.⁵³ But by the end of the 18th century this trade had undergone a significant transformation: the entire coast of Hokkaido was now dotted with trading posts and commercial fisheries, which employed both Ainu and Japanese. Wage labour at such posts gradually replaced trade as the Ainu's principal source of iron, rice, and saké.⁵⁴ The seasonal rhythms of Ainu hunting and fishing were heavily influenced by their involvement in the market, but this does not imply that they completely lost their idiosyncrasy. Acquired goods were integrated in very specific ways; correctly conducting ritual and preparing curled willow shavings assured good fortune in one's dealing with the Japanese.⁵⁵ In short, they may be characterized by a considerable degree of resilience, but it would be inadequate to envisage the Ainu as an ethnic isolate; it turns out that they are quite cosmopolitan, and have been so for as long as can be ascertained. What is more, nothing indicates that animistic peoples elsewhere in the world are fundamentally different in this respect.

Southern Asia

Venturing from northern to southern Asia, I now focus on the animism of the Batek and the Chewong of the Malay Peninsula. Both groups identify closely with their rainforest environment and conceive of themselves as 'forest people'. The self-designation *batek* is usually translated as 'person of our group'. The Chewong refer to themselves simply as 'us', *he*, or 'people us', *bi he*. My suggestion is that these expressions do not denote an eternal category of humanity but rather humans in continuous fabrication, that is, Humans. Only those who consistently sustain the appropriate forest-oriented way of life qualify as such: Humanity never comes for free. It always requires a special effort; one is obliged to *keep in shape* perpetually. More concretely, Kirk Endicott has shown that Batek people regard the forest as their true home; whenever they camp in or near clearings, they say they are only 'lodging' there.⁵⁶ He underlines their strong emphasis on sharing food, especially meat, with as many people as possible. Besides hunting with blowpipes, Batek forest dwellers gather wild yams, fruits, and honey, and they also trade products such as rattan with Malays or Chinese merchants. They explain their preference for living in the forest rather than in clearings or near big streams by stating that the forest is cool. It is not only deemed more comfortable because of this, but also more healthy. The sun epitomizes excessive heat, which the Batek are at pains to avoid. They blame the heat for many types of disease, and their dislike of the sun's heat is the main reason why they long resisted taking up agriculture. Very similar ideas recur among the Chewong. Signe Howell reports that 'it is only once they have put a large expanse of primary forest between themselves and the rest of the world that they feel happy

and secure'.⁵⁷ As eaters of wild tubers, they contrast themselves with the Malays, who cultivate rice.

Clearly, the Batek and Chewong versions of Humanity are closely linked with this special way of life. Those who do not share meat, those who do not hunt, and those who do not live in a cool forest environment cannot possibly maintain their Human shape. I would even suggest that those who mainly eat rice and crops grown in clearings rather than forest foods such as fruits and tubers are not or, at least did not, use to be considered Human at all. However, this restrictedness of Humanity does not preclude a distinctive openness. This is testified by Howell's own experiences. She describes how Chewong adults would reassure children who were frightened of her: 'she is one of us (*bi he*), she is a forest woman'.⁵⁸ From her account one can surmise that she was presumed to be non-Human at first, but as she gradually got accepted by her hosts and honed her skills as a 'forest woman', she was included within Humanity. In fact, there is no reason to think that this kind of inclusion would only be possible for white people (Howell is Norwegian); one can reasonably suppose that it occasionally happens with neighbouring Malays or Chinese too. Once more, we see that Humanity is simultaneously restricted and open.

We move on to the Bay of Bengal to acquaint ourselves with the *ongee*—literally 'the men'—of the Andaman Islands. The Ongees are classically described as hunters, sea fishers, and gatherers,⁵⁹ but contemporary ethnographers emphasize that they have never lived in absolute isolation from the wider world. Even before the British colonizers arrived during the 19th century, they frequently interacted with Burmese and Malay traders, collectors of birds' nests, and pirates.⁶⁰ Yet again, the image of a small-scale society frozen in time turns out to be inadequate.⁶¹ For the purposes of this introduction I nevertheless limit myself to discussing a couple of age-old habits and practices that have remained remarkably stable over time. Before anything else, it should be mentioned that Ongees have a pronounced predilection for chewy foodstuffs. Soft and liquid items such as honey, which can be consumed without mastication, are considered unsuitable for people. With regards to subsistence, they like to hunt an endemic species of jungle pig with bows and arrows. Fishing in the sea is usually accomplished with the same tools while standing in knee high water, especially during low tide. Sometimes they paddle out in their dugout outrigger canoes to harpoon sea turtles and dugongs. Apart from hunting and fishing, Ongees depend on gathering edible tubers in the forest. All these activities are predicated on seasonal patterns involving translocations from the coastal area to the deeper forest and vice versa. 'It is a life', Vishvajit Pandya states, 'that depends much on movement and moving around'.⁶² The weather is a key factor in that respect and more particularly the winds, which are identified with the spirits (*tomya, lau*).

Ultimately, everything is about smell. In fact, winds, spirits, and smell cannot be dissociated.⁶³ In Onge animism, smell is invisible and moves in

and out of one's body. One man explains it as follows: 'Just as the water of the sea comes to land, fills the creeks and then goes back to fill the sea—one never sees who does this filling in and filling back, rising high and falling low—our bodies are also filled in and release smell.'⁶⁴ The control of smell is a permanent worry and the Ongees' obstinate use of fire, clay paints, and human bones has everything to do with that.⁶⁵ Pandya shows that these substances function as armour: without them, the human body 'cracks up' as a result of the impact of the winds and the release of smell which attracts the spirits.⁶⁶ Ongee are therefore rarely seen without fire. Their campsites are usually constructed in a circular pattern around a central hearth; the residential area is thus protected by a permanent screen of smoke. Even during a heavy downpour of rain they are particular about saving burning wood. Clay paints and bone ornaments are equally envisaged as a means to restrict the movement of smell and to 'bind' it to its source—the human body.

Besides smell, weight is another obsession. Actually, there is a link between the two because the release of smell always implies a change of weight.⁶⁷ The vernacular term for 'heavy' signifies that one lives together with one's kin, that one benefits from the sharing of food and hence that one is doing all right.⁶⁸ Heaviness, the state of being full of food, makes it very difficult for the spirits to hunt the Ongees by smell and quasi impossible to abduct them. Those who live on their own, on the other hand, soon become light and hungry; such Ongees are easily carried away by the spirits. In short, safety, health, heaviness, and smell are closely related. Even in the most mundane acts, such as greeting:

Following the basic greeting and exchange of pleasantries, the Ongees act out the following scenario. If a person says that he is heavy, he sits down on the lap of the person who has asked him how he is, and rubs his or her nose on the cheek of the inquirer. [The term used for this] ceremonial act of sitting down in an embrace is [the same as the one] used for an encounter with the spirits. If the response of the person is that he is light, the inquirer takes the person's hand and blows on it. The Ongees describe the acts of rubbing the nose and blowing on the hand as shifting smells, from one to the other.⁶⁹

All this shows yet again that Humanity is not taken for granted within animism. Those who emit smell or lose weight put their Human shape at risk. In the words of Pandya himself, the human subject 'is constantly haunted by the possibility of its collapse'.⁷⁰ In order to maintain one's Humanity, a sustained effort is required. The movement of smell must be controlled at all times, whereas heaviness has to be promoted ceaselessly. The role of fire, clay paints, and bone ornaments is far from gratuitous: it reconfirms the Humanity of those who use these substances continuously; it *keeps them in shape*. Masticating food is equally important, for within Ongee animism the essence of Humanity is to chew. Those who depend on soft and liquid

food because they lack teeth, such as babies and the elderly, are often envisaged as jawless spirits, that is, as non-Humans.⁷¹ In sum, the term *ongee* refers to ‘humans in perpetual fabrication’ rather than to any pre-existing category of humans. We are talking about shape, not classification.

Africa

Changing continents once more, I propose to focus on Uduk animism. The Uduk of the Sudanese-Ethiopian borderlands refer to themselves as *wathim pa*, which Wendy James translates as ‘person’ or, more literally, ‘the one of the home’. She reports that the term designates ‘those who have become over time a civilized human community, carving out and maintaining in the face of environmental danger and death a home (*pa*) for themselves in the midst of the forest’.⁷² It is used to discriminate between Uduk and outsiders such as the Nuer or the Arabs, but also between human beings and bush creatures, and between the living and the dead. Everything is conceived of in terms of the perpetual struggle between these respective poles. Yet this does not imply that becoming ‘of the home’ is impossible. James notes that ‘bringing in wild and lost people and making them into a part of the moral community of the homeland is basic to the people’s understanding of who they are and how their society has come to be what it is.’⁷³

The Uduk primarily think (or at least used to think) of themselves as cultivators and, more specifically, as producers of grains. Although they hunt and fish occasionally, and also herd goats and cattle, the hoe cultivation of sorghum, maize, and sesame occupies most of their time. As James expresses it: ‘The cultivation of the earth is the prime duty of every *wathim pa*: it is a collective task, and it constitutes the base of community life.’⁷⁴ She continues: ‘Not only should those living together hoe together, but the fruits of this work are supposed to be shared out in a brotherly spirit.’⁷⁵ Cultivation is referred to as weeding. What we have here is an ingrained synecdoche by means of which Uduk cultivators systematically name the general activity by its heaviest and most demanding subtask: the weeding over of fields using a hand-hoe. ‘Weeding’, James underscores, is ‘regular and obligatory’. It is worth citing her in more detail on this crucial matter:

[T]he weeding goes on inexorably. It is particularly vital in the meadow fields near the river, where the thick heavy clay soil supports grass and other vegetation which would easily choke the delicate growing maize. These meadows have to be weeded over at least three times in the early rains.⁷⁶

Not to weed and to neglect one’s fields is unthinkable. A man who does not grow the three main staples and fails to fulfil the concomitant expectations of cooperation and sharing is scorned as lazy and as lacking manhood.⁷⁷ When James employed two young men as research assistants, the latter

always took good care that this did not appear too obvious. They spent considerable time cultivating the fields; that she would pay others to work on their fields was not an option. Whereas weeding is primarily a male task, the principal responsibility of women is to prepare porridge and beer, which requires a great deal of grinding. Proper, nourishing food is per definition ground food made from plain grains (sorghum and maize). If you do not have enough of these, even if plenty of fish or meat is available, you are struck by hunger. And it is essential that porridge and beer are shared within the hamlet: women must not only feed their own husbands or brothers, but all those who occasionally assist in their fields. James concludes: 'A woman's place is at the grinding stone; lazy women are criticized for not grinding as lazy men are criticized for not cultivating'.⁷⁸ In short, one could say that to grind is for Uduk women what to weed is for Uduk men.

My contention is that *wathim pa* should be understood as 'Human', in the sense proposed in this chapter; it denotes shape rather than identity. If Humanity always implies a special effort, then it is (or at least was) quintessentially weeding and grinding in Uduk animism. To *keep in shape*, i.e. to maintain one's Humanity, one has to hoe together, share grains, eat porridge, and drink beer. If this line of thought is correct, 'laziness' indicates the loss of one's Human shape. In fact, James has convincingly demonstrated that—also in Africa—'humans are made', just as has been described by her colleagues who work in Amazonia. Her 1979 monograph is not coincidentally subtitled *The Making of the Uduk People*. The idea is further elaborated in a subsequent book, wherein she discusses ritual practices that focus on the gradual building up, strengthening, maturing, and repairing of the person as he or she goes through life. Her assertion that 'wholeness, soundness, freshness must be worked for and maintained' confirms, once again, that Humanity always requires the maintenance a specific effort.⁷⁹

Finally, I mention Samburu and Maasai animism in Kenya's Rift Valley.⁸⁰ Perhaps the most prominent feature of these Maa-speaking peoples is their pastoralist lifestyle. The interdependence of the people and their cattle is particularly striking. Maa pastoralists have a veritable 'obsession with cattle', Paul Spencer notes; '[they] talk, live and marry through cattle'.⁸¹ Besides this bias towards cattle, their age system and their preference for polygamy are key elements. In fact, all of this is closely intertwined. Marriage payments involve lots of cattle both among the Samburu and the Maasai.⁸² The success of elders in acquiring wives therefore depends to a large extent on the dynamics of herd growth. I say 'elders' because Maa men tend to marry quite late, as a result of their specific age-set organization. A central aspect here is that a group of young bachelors, known as *moran*, are set apart from the rest of society. These *moran* or 'warriors' mostly reside in the bush, away from the settlements of their parents and younger siblings. In contrast to their kinsmen, they lead a peculiarly adventurous life, engaging in all sorts of errands, cattle raids, and warfare. Spencer underscores that 'the unacknowledged effect of this prolonged

bachelorhood is to create a surplus of younger wives for older men, facilitating a high rate of polygyny'.⁸³ In short, the principal age-grades through which every Maa man must pass are those of boy, *moran*, and elder.⁸⁴ A new age-set is established approximately once every fifteen years. Insofar that those who belong to a different age-set share a 'commitment to cattle', as Spencer aptly words it, their respective actions are complementary.⁸⁵ To quote him more fully:

One may identify two principal strategies for building up herds which I refer to here as *predation* and *peaceful husbandry* respectively. Predation depends upon the exploits of younger men as successful warriors to augment the herds through raiding, and it is they who effectively control this strategy. Peaceful husbandry depends on diligent herding and is controlled by the older men as individual stock-owners, with the younger men held responsible for defending the herds and maintaining the tribal claim to its territories and its vital resources of pasture and water.⁸⁶

There is one quality, *nkanyit*, which embodies almost everything that is expected of a mature Samburu person. It acquires different shades of meaning in different contexts and may be rendered variously as respect, a sense of shame, honour, a sense of duty, politeness, or decency.⁸⁷ When Samburu emphasize the virtues of this quality, I would say that they uphold their Humanity. To count as truly Human one should own one's own herd and, ideally, increase it. Such people are known as 'worthy men', as opposed to 'mean men'. Meanness is a favourite topic of the Samburu: only mean men do not care for their cattle or refuse to help their close kinsmen; only mean men are jealous or curse out of sheer spite. This contrast confirms that Humanity is always a conditional position—acting in a mean way implies losing it. But things can also change for the better. Bilinda Straight has shown that outsiders who are married or adopted by a Samburu actually become Samburu by living, eating, and performing ritual observances with their new family. 'Thus', she concludes, 'a pure Samburu is not simply born but made through daily practice and residence over time.'⁸⁸ Again, we see that Humanity is a never-ending effort rather than a given. At all times, it requires *keeping in shape*. A very similar pattern is encountered among the Maasai, their 'linguistic cousins'. Thomas Spear characterizes their lifestyle as highly ethnocentric and exclusionary, but at the same time unusually accessible to anyone who wishes to embrace it.⁸⁹ He reports that Maasai usually defined others in pejorative terms but adds that 'those same others could and did become pastoral Maasai by becoming "people of cattle", whereas pastoral Maasai frequently became others by losing their cattle and becoming farmers or hunters.'⁹⁰ This exemplifies that Humanity is simultaneously restricted and open: only pastoralists are true Humans. In the end, what matters is commitment rather than identity: Humanity is not a fixed category but a continuous effort.

FROM RESTRICTED HUMANITY TO RESTRICTED LIFE

Essentially, this chapter has put the modern anthropological concept of humanity in perspective. By showing the worldwide occurrence of Humanity as shape I have revealed the unsuspected arbitrariness of that modern notion, which underpins the contemporary Western cosmology. My findings complement Michel Foucault's well-known thesis that the concept of humanity and the anthropology that accompanies it are a relatively late-occurring event in the history of the West.⁹¹ To recap, I have elaborated an idea that was originally developed in 1979 by three Amazonia-specialists—Seeger, da Matta, and Viveiros de Castro. As the latter formulated it in a more recent publication, human beings are 'made' or 'fabricated'.⁹² I have shown that this notion of Humanity, a humanity that always requires a specific effort, is actually more widespread than commonly acknowledged—it is not limited to the confines of one specific ethnographic region. As such, my argument possibly goes beyond what the original authors themselves would approve of. At least initially, they explicitly cast their model as an Amazonian one, contrasting it to those of their colleagues working in Africa or Melanesia. My impression is that they have been too timid. Whereas the evidence I have presented here is too limited to be conclusive, I would not be surprised if it was established that conceptions of Humanity are found among most if not all so-called indigenous people. In any case, the present chapter has documented a remarkably coherent, worldwide proclivity to envisage Humanity as something that is premised on *keeping in shape*.

What characterizes animism is the implicit rejection of an idea that adherents of the Western cosmology have propagated with such great success—that of an effortless humanity. The animistic Humanity is not a classificatory device but a position that has to be maintained and defended perpetually. Viveiros de Castro's prediction that a lot can be gained by grasping the fabrication of humans as a kind of 'contra-metamorphosis' is more visionary than has been recognized so far—this will become clearer in the second part of the monograph.⁹³ We have seen that it is also a Humanity that is simultaneously restricted and open. Those who cannot keep up the appropriate effort are mercilessly excluded. But at the same time there is always the potential of becoming Human, whatever one's background. Nothing is pre-defined, everything depends on commitment. These insights suggest that the self-designations of those whom anthropologists habitually refer to as 'indigenous' denote or, at least, used to denote a specific Human shape rather than a class or category of humans (an 'ethnic group', a 'culture', a 'society', and so forth). Their subsequent sedimentation as ethnonyms is relatively recent or, in any case, does not predate the colonial epoch.

As a next step, I suggest that approaching 'life' in a similar way as 'humanity' will prove to be insightful. I propose to think of life as a particular shape rather than as an inherent property of animate beings. For the sake of clarity and consistency, I will use capitalization and speak of 'Life'

from now onwards. I will demonstrate that this restricted Life, just like restricted Humanity, always requires a particular effort. It has to be kept in shape perpetually. In contrast to the modern biological concept of life, Life must be maintained at all times. However, there is no need to worry overly about the finer nuances of that crucial difference at this point; they will be elucidated gradually as we proceed. To conclude I would like to underline that this link between Humanity and Life is less incongruous than one may think at first. A little etymological excursion is apposite in this respect. In Old English the noun *life* covered some of the modern range of meaning, but obviously not exactly the sense it acquired with the emergence of biology as a scientific discipline. The connotation of 'continuance' or 'perseverance' recurs in many Germanic languages. The term also used to denote 'body': the Old Norse *lif*, the Dutch *lijf*, and the German *Leib* exemplify this intriguing conflation. The Old English verb *lifian* is translated as 'to be alive' but also as 'to supply oneself with food'; etymologists tell us it derives from the ancient Indo-European *leip*, 'to remain, continue'. To be sure, such cursory etymological musings are not definite proof but they are tantalizing nevertheless.

2 Monsters

An Argument Against Foreigners

[T]he natives [of New Caledonia] thought the white men to be the spirits of the dead who bring sickness, and assigned this as their reason for wishing to kill white men.

—Edward B. Tylor (2010b [1871]: 5)

Le monstre c'est le vivant de valeur négative.

—Georges Canguilhem (2009 [1965]: 220)

For so-called indigenous people, the very idea of foreigner is or, at least used to be, impossible. At first this contention may seem outrageous yet in this chapter it will emerge that the notion of 'other people' is nothing but a colonial export of relatively recent origin, akin to such things as the horse, the shotgun, or measles. What is more, it is as if modern anthropology—grafted on the theoretical possibility of foreigners—is implicated in a secret plot to cover up the notion's contrived, peculiarly Western character. In a similar vein, I argue that 'the supernatural' is a fairly recent creation. Spirits, divinities, and gods are unthinkable within animism.

At this point, I would like to pick up a couple of issues that have remained in suspense. If Humanity always requires a specific effort, what about those who do not fulfil the conditions? If Humanity is restricted, what about those who fall outside its limits? If it is open, to whom or what is it potentially open? But before I outline some answers to these questions a preliminary warning is in order, for the task at hand will be complicated by the sneaking influence of the modern Western cosmology. On the one hand, I refer to the curious belief that there exists such a thing as 'other people'. Whether they speak of 'foreigners', 'strangers', or 'members of a different society', the adherents of the modern cosmology propagate that belief time and again. On the other hand, I refer to notions such as 'spirits', 'divinities', and 'gods'. More precisely, I seek to investigate the allegedly self-evident idea that so-called indigenous people discern a separate domain of 'the supernatural'. Actually, both sets of conceptions are connected. Something that has intrigued ethnographers everywhere is that 'foreigners' are very often attributed 'supernatural' qualities. Conversely, 'spirits' and 'divinities' tend to possess conspicuously 'foreign' characteristics. Whereas this widespread overlap between 'other people' and 'the supernatural' is widely recognized, its exact nature is hotly and sometimes viciously debated. The infamous confrontation between Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere on whether 18th century Hawaiians envisaged Captain Cook as a god is exemplary in this respect.

In order to address this vexed problem from a fresh angle, I return to the Chachi. Their concept *uyala* provides an excellent starting point. When the Spaniards arrived several centuries ago, Chachi people designated them with that expression. At present, it is the vernacular term for 'Whites' (I myself was often called *uyala*). But the word can also be used to refer to any non-Chachi, including Blacks and Amerindians. In addition, *uyala* designates a range of awesome creatures with fantastic properties: my Chachi interlocutors described them as ferocious man-eaters who can become invisible at will, occasionally change into bamboo, and so forth. Would it be appropriate, then, to translate *uyala* alternately as 'other people' and as something like 'evil spirits'? Not quite, because both poles are not readily distinguishable. Here I can speak from my own experience.

In the early stages of my fieldwork there were persistent queries about my alimentary habits. One man asked: 'Is it true that in your country there are man-eaters?' Replying that I had never heard of such a thing, I was assured that at least in Quito, Ecuador's capital, there are Whites trafficking human flesh. Such commerce was also deemed to take place closer by. In a village only one hour downstream from where I lived, rumour had it that a lodge that was being built there for American tourists was in fact a facility that would allow white man-eaters to feast on Chachi children. In fact, previous researchers have encountered exactly the same difficulties.¹ The arrival of John Lindscoog, a missionary from the Summer Institute of Linguistics who worked in the river Cayapas area in the 1960s, was recounted to me follows:

The first Gringo who came to this area was Juan. We were afraid and asked the local guide who was accompanying him: 'Does that Gringo eat people?' The guide replied that he did not. Later, when he already spoke a bit of the vernacular, Juan confirmed that he did not eat humans and insisted that he was human himself.

To be sure, this is not a recent phenomenon. The European conquistadors of the 16th century were treated in a similar manner. In myths, the Spaniards are explicitly opposed to 'proper humans' or, more exactly, to Humans. They are depicted as promiscuous, clumsy, and warlike, entirely unlike the Chachi who pride themselves not only on their observance of strict monogamy and their skills as canoe crafters and hunters but also on their peaceful attitude. 'Unlike those *uyala*, we Chachi live tranquilly', I was told time and again. The Spaniards, in contrast, were envisaged as ferocious and aggressive, and also as man-eaters. For the Chachi, such horrendous characteristics (no doubt partly based on empirical observation) were conclusive proof that these newly arrived Europeans were *not* Humans. This is an illustration of the restrictedness of Humanity.

The point cannot be overemphasized: Spaniards, Whites, and non-Chachi in general are *not* Humans. Within animism, such outsiders are

never thought of as ‘foreigners’, ‘strangers’, or any kind of ‘other people’. The difference is much more radical: those who are not Chachi have absolutely nothing in common with those who are. To designate the former as foreigners is mistaken because that kind of expression implies a shared humanity: a foreigner may be different, *but only a little bit* because he or she is still considered human. In Chachi animism, however, Spaniards and Whites are *very* different; there is actually no common ground whatsoever. The Western notion of a shared human nature is meaningless in this context. Chachi and non-Chachi, Humans and non-Humans, are conceived of as entirely incommensurable. The notion of multiple cultures, greatly promoted within the Western cosmology, is equally useless. We are dealing with a situation where there is one and only one Humanity, and where ‘Humans unlike us’ are inconceivable. In Chachi animism, the very idea of ‘other people’ is logically impossible—a contradiction in terms. Could ‘the supernatural’ possibly provide a way out? If Spaniards and all the rest are not ‘other people’, can we perhaps qualify them as supernatural beings—as ‘spirits’ or ‘divinities’? Given that they are in no way more immaterial, invisible, phantasmal, or transcendental than the Chachi themselves one quickly realizes that this is not really a satisfactory solution. Chachi and non-Chachi are in every respect entirely equivalent.

But if Spaniards and Whites are neither ‘other people’ nor ‘supernatural’, what are they? So far, I did not get beyond defining them in negative terms: they are not Human. Still, some progress has been made for it has been established that these non-Humans are simultaneously incommensurable with and equivalent to Humans. That is an important insight and it should be stressed: Humans and non-Humans, *chachi* and *uyala*, are wholly incommensurable and completely equivalent at the same time. These terms refer to distinct shapes, not classes or categories. Whereas both shapes have exactly the same general properties (visibility, materiality, etc.) they share no common ground whatsoever: if Humans are Alive, non-Humans are necessarily Dead—I will come back to this fundamental point further onwards. That Spaniards and Whites are Dead may sound counterintuitive at first, certainly to those who are under the spell of the Western cosmology, where ‘life’ is systematically confused with ‘the animate’. Within animism, by contrast, Humans and non-Humans, the Living and the Dead, are equivalent. Consequently, these respective shapes are all equally animate—just as they are all equally visible, material, and so forth. There cannot be any qualitative difference between distinct shapes.

It is now time to present my definition in positive terms: instead of referring to Spaniards and their likes as non-Humans, I propose to call them ‘Monsters’. As always, capitalization is used to indicate that we are dealing with a shape. So far, my account of this simultaneous equivalence and incommensurability has been very sketchy. Things will become clearer in the next section, where I examine *uyala* and some closely related concepts in more depth.

MONSTROSITY AMOUNTS TO A CONTRARY EFFORT

The notion *uyala* is more versatile than I have shown as yet. To provide a fuller picture, I rely on what one impressively knowledgeable animist, Grandma Estela, told me about a whole range of specific *uyala*. Twentieth century ethnographers of the Chachi have put these variously under the rubric of 'spirits' or under that of 'foreigners' (cf. Barrett [1925: 360–81]; Altschuler [1964: 81–3]; Carrasco [1988: 147–58]). Approaching them as Monsters will clear up some of the confusion.

Ferocious Indians

In the past, the Chachi were frequently attacked by a particular kind of *uyala* known as *jeenuyala* or *indios bravos*, what I translate as Ferocious Indians. Grandma Estela described them as enemies, powerful shamans, malicious murderers, kidnappers of women, and—something she rarely failed to mention—man-eaters. At present, they are believed to have retired into the deep forest. Once in a while Chachi hunters discover huge footprints, presumed to be from gigantic Ferocious Indians. Such traces are often accompanied by those of a jaguar because, as Grandma Estela put it, 'jaguars are the dogs of the Ferocious Indians'. Strikingly, Ferocious Indians always seem to be portrayed in contrast to proper Chachi or Humans. The former eat their food raw, the latter cooked. Whereas Ferocious Indians are deemed to eat no salt, Chachi lavishly season their food. Where one eats human flesh, the other would never do so. Ferocious Indians live in trees in the forest and wear tree-bark clothes, Humans live in houses in villages and dress properly. Whereas the former are deemed to be aggressive and sexually voracious giants, the latter are of normal stature and present themselves always as peaceful and monogamous. In sum, Ferocious Indians consistently act in an obviously non-Human way. They are conceived of as inverse Chachi—the opposite of Human beings. They are Monsters. Crucially, Ferocious Indians and Chachi, Monsters and Humans, should be conceived of as distinct shapes and not as dichotomous classes or categories. Just as Humanity inevitably requires a specific effort, Monstrosity is always premised on a contrary effort.

Monstrosity and Humanity exclude each other totally; there is no partial overlap between the two. If one is Human, the other is not. If one is Alive, the other is not. In Chachi animism, Ferocious Indians are neither 'other humans' nor even 'other living beings'. They are not just a little bit different but entirely incommensurable. Strictly speaking, they are Dead. Yet it is also important to grasp that Chachi and Ferocious Indians are entirely equivalent. Humans and Monsters, the Living and the Dead, may be radically distinct but there is no distinction in kind. The former shapes are not more (or less) visible, material, or animate than the latter. There is no parallel with classificatory distinctions such as that between 'humans' and 'spirits'.

Such observations may appear somewhat obscure at this point. Their salience will become apparent, however, when we discuss one of the more intriguing properties of shapes: the fact that they can shift suddenly, something that will be treated in great depth further onwards. For now I only mention that, as much as they are considered anti-Humans or anti-Chachi, the Ferocious Indians are spoken of as Humans or Chachi. They may live in trees in the forest, but from their own point of view these are houses. They may have jaguars accompanying them but they see them as dogs. In myths the Ferocious Indians are depicted as lusting for blood but, looking from their perspective, it turns out that they do not drink blood but honey.

Guerrilla-Fighters

In the Maché-Chindul nature reserve there is an on-going problem with *uyala* invading native lands. The Chachi inhabitants of the reserve refer to the latter as Guerrilla-Fighters (*guerrilleros*) or Invaders (*invasores*); they share many of the characteristics attributed to Ferocious Indians. Not only are they believed to be of gigantic stature, they are also feared as predatory killers and despised for their promiscuity. Such descriptions may seem speculative, but their presence is not merely imagined. The local press regularly reports about incursions of Colombian rebel groups, drug traffickers, and weapon smugglers. According to the Ecuadorian Ministry of the Environment about nine hundred families have come to live within the borders of the Maché-Chindul reserve after its creation in 1996; by the standards of the Ecuadorian law, these are illegal encroachers. At times, Invaders operate quite openly. In one village I witnessed a couple of encroachers pulling a raft of valuable timber. All wood came from Chachi territories, but my hosts refrained from doing anything to prevent the theft. Taking into account the death threats that several Chachi leaders had received, their reluctance becomes understandable. Most had not yet forgotten that Lorenzo Añapa, a leader who fought against such practices, had been murdered only a couple of years previously.

The example shows that it would be inadequate to speak of 'spirits': Guerrilla-Fighters and Invaders are not different in kind from Chachi, both are equally visible, tangible, animate. It would be equally inadequate to categorize them as 'other people'. Their aggressive and murderous demeanour is a contrary effort, which disqualifies them as Chachi: Invaders are Monsters, they are not Human. To designate them as 'enemies' or 'foreigners' would be erroneous, for such terms imply that there is a common denominator (i.e. 'humanity'). I would even go further and suggest that this disqualifies them as living beings altogether: they are Dead rather than Alive (this sounds strange to adherents of the Western cosmology, but that is only due to a dogged confusion between life and the animate, as will be explained further onwards). Between distinct shapes there is no shared ground whatsoever, Guerrilla-Fighters and Invaders are not merely a little bit different

from Chachi. Within an animistic framework, they are *very* different. In sum, we see once again that Monsters and Humans are simultaneously equivalent and radically incommensurable.

River Dwellers and Hill Dwellers

Sometimes, the contrastive conduct of *uyala* is not so much envisaged in terms of aggressive demeanour or promiscuity as in terms of their other-worldly activities. That is the case for River Dwellers (*pichulla*) and Hill Dwellers (*bu'chulla*), malicious man-eaters who live underwater and underground, respectively. River Dwellers are at home in turbulent water, especially near rapids and waterfalls. To this day, the Chachi avoid settling near such locations. Consider the following account:

One day, a River Dweller made an appearance in the guise of a gorgeous woman. She seduced a Chachi man and invited him to visit her family. They walked to the riverbank and dived into the water. When he looked up, the man saw the bottoms of Chachi canoes. 'Sometimes they damage the roofs of our houses with their paddles', the River Dweller explained, 'and that is why we harm them.' Her home under the river surface looked exactly like an ordinary Chachi house. Inside, the man was overwhelmed by the huge quantities of food he encountered. There were *guaña* [a common river fish] and crayfish everywhere, and he ate them avidly. The woman was shocked by this behaviour, for she perceived these animals as cockroaches and spiders.

Note the difference in perspective: the same things are seen differently depending on one's point of view. What is edible from a Human perspective is inedible from that of a River Dweller. Yet, from their own viewpoint River Dwellers are Human: they have families just like the Chachi, live in ordinary houses, etc. But River Dwellers are neither 'other people' nor anything 'supernatural'. Rather, they incarnate a specific form of Monstrosity and their dwelling underwater is first and foremost a contrary effort.

As for Hill Dwellers, who are thought to live in caves and cavities, the same pattern emerges. When Grandma Estela went to the deep forest she sometimes painted herself with a particular kind of annatto as a protective measure. In Chachi gardens a black and a yellow variety are cultivated. Humans only ever paint their bodies with black annatto, deemed to be poisonous for Hill Dwellers. The latter are said to have a yellowish skin, because they paint themselves with the other variety. Their viewpoint is explicitly contrasted to that of Humans, as another of Grandma Estela's accounts exemplifies:

A Chachi youth went into the forest to make a canoe but was seduced by a Hill Dweller woman. She asked him to visit her family. They went to her house, which ordinary folks would have perceived as the

entrance of a cave, but he was too much under her influence to notice this. Upon entering the cave/house the woman immediately hid her lover. She did this to protect him from her father and her brother, both of whom appeared to him as jaguars. As they approached, they asked her where that wonderful pineapple smell came from, for Hill Dwellers usually perceive Chachi as delicious fruit. Only after they had promised not to harm him did the woman present her lover. They offered him a chair to sit on but, to his horror, that appeared to be a boa constrictor. Instead, they suggested that he sat in a hammock, but he fell through it as it was just a cobweb. As everybody was hungry, they proposed that he collected some pumpkins. Every time he bent over to get one, however, the vegetables jumped away and revealed themselves as armadillos, agoutis, and other kinds of animals that nest in holes. He then spotted a couple of partridges, a wild species, and to make up for his failure with the pumpkins he tried to shoot them. Against his expectations, the girl's family members reacted angrily: 'Why do you want to kill our chickens?'

In short, Hill Dwellers are Monsters that exhibit conspicuously non-Human demeanour such as living underground, eating people, and keeping wildfowl in their houses. Such contrary efforts indicate that Chachi and Hill Dwellers—Humans and Monsters—are not just a little bit different but mutually exclusive. There is no common ground between these respective shapes; they are radically incommensurable. If Chachi are Alive, Hill Dwellers (and the same goes for River Dwellers) are Dead. It is no coincidence that the latter are said to abound in the vicinity of graveyards—they literally pertain to the domain of death. At the same time, Humans and Dwellers are completely equivalent. Even though their behaviour is antithetical, there is no qualitative difference between them. People such as Grandma Estela are adamant that they are both equally tangible and equally animate. A remarkable feature that remains to be discussed more fully is that Hill Dwellers perceive themselves as Human. From their own point of view, they do not eat people but pineapple; and they do not keep wildfowl but chickens.

Water Dragons

In a curve a little downstream from the confluence of the rivers Cayapas and Onzole there is a place known locally as 'the back of the Water Dragon'. It is a pool, a spot where the river is broad and deep and where there is a fairly strong counter-current. In the rainy season, when the river is swollen, it becomes a dangerous whirlpool. Its name is derived from the fact that a Water Dragon (*pipiñi*) is supposed to have lived there. Such man-eating creatures are associated with the tides. Chachi people say that when a Water Dragon spits out water high tide occurs; at low tide, it swallows the water.

Seaquakes, tidal waves, and sudden increases of the water level are linked to Water Dragons vomiting water. Many stories are told about these peculiar *uyala*, and I here present one example recounted by Grandma Estela:

Once upon a time, people could never travel beyond the big whirlpool. Those who did risk going further, for example to fish at sea, never came back alive because they were eaten by the Water Dragon. Some courageous Chachi decided to do something about this problem. They constructed a balsa raft and deliberately let themselves be swallowed by the Dragon. Inside the beast, they managed to cut out its heart with their knives. The Water Dragon felt quite bad after this and went searching for a cure. He encountered an opossum which he perceived as a shaman. ‘What have you eaten?’ the latter asked. The Dragon replied: ‘Just some frogs that happened to drift by on a branch.’ The opossum/shaman pointed out that he actually had eaten human beings on a raft. He could not help him further. The Dragon then looked for another shaman who, in fact, was a water opossum. However, the second curer could not help him either. Lastly, he consulted a medical doctor who was, from a Chachi perspective, a cayman living in the pool. The cayman/medic diagnosed him as terminally ill; no remedy was possible. Only after the death of this Water Dragon did the river *Cayapas* become navigable in its entirety.

Yet again, the confusion of viewpoints plays a prominent role: opossums are shamans, caymans are medics, and humans on a balsa raft are frogs on a branch. This shows that Water Dragons live in a Human world beneath the water surface, albeit one that ordinary people cannot perceive as such. From a Chachi perspective, their conduct is the antithesis of appropriate Human behaviour; as incorrigible man-eaters hiding in whirlpools, they persistently engage in a contrary effort. Chachi abhor eating human flesh and avoid building their houses near turbulent water, where there are countercurrents. By doing the reverse, Water Dragons demonstrate that they are not Human; they are Monsters. This contrariness entails incommensurability: Chachi and Water Dragons—Humans and Monsters—have absolutely nothing in common. If the former are Alive, the latter are Dead (I return to this crucial point at the end of this chapter). Still, both shapes are perfectly equivalent. In Chachi animism, Water Dragons are not more phantasmal or intangible than Humans; they are equally visible and equally animate. In short, Water Dragons are simultaneously incommensurable with and equivalent to Chachi; they are neither ‘other people’ nor supernatural beings but Monsters.

Man-Eaters, a Summary

This little excursion into the intricacies of man-eating *uyala* has exposed that what makes you a Monster is not so much the way you look, but

your conduct. What matters is shape, not intrinsic nature. In a way, this merely confirms what numerous South America specialists have long noted: appearance as such is deceptive and the true character of any entity only transpires when one carefully observes its behaviour.² Consuming human flesh without salt makes one a Ferocious Indian. It is in confusing the smell of humans with that of pineapples that one reveals oneself as a Hill Dweller. Taking people for frogs betrays that one is a Water Dragon, and so forth. Moreover, Monstrosity is not just marked by what one eats or drinks. In general, one could say that Monsters do not work nor marry properly. They do not hunt as they should, for what Chachi consider legitimate prey are domestic animals from their perspective: partridges are chickens for Hill Dwellers, felines are dogs for Ferocious Indians, etc. Neither do they fish in the same way as Humans do, for what the latter consider to be an edible catch are insects of a repugnant kind from the viewpoint of the former (think of the account about the River Dweller). The promiscuous proclivities of Whites, Hispanics, and all those associated with Guerrilla-Fighters and Invaders are stressed time and again. In contrast to Chachi, the latter are often depicted as unashamedly polygamous. 'Living badly' (*firu'chunu*) is opposed to 'living well' (*ura'chunu*), Monstrous shape is contrasted with Human shape. To recap: whereas Humanity unfailingly requires a specific effort, Monstrosity always amounts to a contrary effort.

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MONSTROUS SHAPES

How far is the notion of Monstrosity, as outlined so far, useful beyond the Chachi context? To what extent is the unsatisfactory character of ideas such as 'other people', 'the supernatural', and their respective spin-offs a limited phenomenon? To answer these questions, I continue the comparative exercise begun in the previous chapter.

Amazonia—Brazilian Rubber Tappers, Whites

In Wari' animism, the term *wijam* refers to unrelated Indians as well as Brazilians and Whites more generally. The term is often translated as 'enemy'. Before the intensified contacts with Brazilian mainstream society in the second half of the 20th century the Wari' lived in an almost permanent state of war. Aparecida Vilaça points out that the notion of *wijam* must be understood in that context and insists that this situation was not necessarily seen as something deplorable.³ Actually, oral tradition indicates a vindication and perhaps even a certain pride in the fact that there never was any kind of truce or pacific interaction with non-Wari'. Until at least 1915 their principal adversaries were neighbouring Amerindians but from then onwards rubber tappers and other white invaders took over that role. Apparently this development was welcomed, at least initially, because there had been a worrying

scarcity of suitable opponents in the period preceding the arrival of the Brazilians. Although sometimes conducted in vengeance for the death of a kinsperson, a typical war expedition was seen as a desirable end in itself: those who participated (and also their relatives) were said to become fatter and hence more beautiful.⁴ Of course, the Wari' have often been on the receiving end of attacks, too, especially during the 20th century. On various occasions their houses were burnt, their gardens destroyed, and they themselves massacred with automatic guns.⁵ 'The Whites killed us', one man commented, 'They ate us. It was as if we had become their prey'.⁶

Ultimately, the Wari' realized they had no chance against such powerful enemies and opted to be 'pacified'. Nowadays many of them frequently interact with Whites, whereas violent confrontations have become rare. Whites are nevertheless still defined in opposition to Wari' and many suspicions remain. Something that is always stressed is that Whites live near big rivers, whereas the Wari' prefer to inhabit the interior forest. The Whites' purported craving for human flesh is contrasted with the Wari's maize- and meat-based diet. In the 1990s Vilaça witnessed several incidents during which people went in hiding, as they feared to be slaughtered by Whites.⁷ Significantly, Whites are often compared with *orotapan*, man-eating underwater predators dwelling in big streams. In many accounts both designations are used interchangeably, which proves that there is no hard-and-fast distinction between 'enemies' and 'spirits' in Wari' animism. That should not surprise us, because Whites are neither 'other people' nor supernatural beings. They are simultaneously equivalent to and incommensurable with Wari'. Whites and Wari' are equally material but nevertheless have no common denominator. If the latter are Alive, the former are Dead (not surprisingly, big rivers are envisaged as the domain of death). Whites and all those designated as *wijam* are not Humans but Monsters. If residing in the interior forest and eating maize delineates Human shape, living near big rivers and preying on people is a contrary effort.

Inexperienced Ethnographers, Baldheads, Whipping Corpses

The Matis term *nawa* designates Indians from neighbouring groups but also Whites and, in at least one case, beginning ethnographers.⁸ Philippe Erikson underlines that such foreigners are always defined in opposition to 'true humans', i.e. they are envisaged as the antithesis of proper Matis. To be precise, they are not so much foreigners—for this presupposes that there is a common ground, a shared humanity—as non-Humans or Monsters. They are not just a little bit distinct from Matis but, as Erikson aptly notes, 'radically different'.⁹ Their scandalous lack of appropriate ornamentation and their general ignorance concerning essential Human prerequisites such as generosity amounts to a contrary effort. When an ethnographer persistently refuses to give them things for instance, Matis will treat such a stingy individual with suitable aloofness and address him as *nawa*, Monster—this

happened to Erikson during his initial fieldwork, as already alluded to in the previous chapter.¹⁰ However, the expression is rather more complex, just like its Chachi counterpart *uyala*, and there are various alternative manifestations of the non-Human.

Neighbouring groups and enemies are sometimes referred to as Baldheads (*maru*).¹¹ They are depicted as hair-less and ornament-less. Erikson has described Baldheads as the antipodes of the Matis.¹² This is an accurate characterization, given the Matis' reluctance to shave head- and body-hair and their obsession with the accumulation of ornaments. Dancers who occasionally incarnate Baldheads are equipped with coarse batons, which Baldheads perceive as giant knives.¹³ The dancers use them to destroy pottery. From a Baldhead perspective, however, they are merely 'sharpening their blades' and the pots are viewed as whetstones. Whipping Corpses (*mariwin*) have also been described as inverse Matis, even though different oppositions are stressed.¹⁴ They carry whips to castigate children who misbehave, something Matis parents would never do. They have a predilection for maize, an item that the manioc- and plantain-eating Matis never consume ordinarily. In the rainy season, precisely the time when maize fully ripens, they appear from under the soil and this is the reason why they are always covered in mud. Evidently, these various activities of Baldheads and Corpses constitute contrary efforts. They are Monsters, entirely incommensurable with Wari'. If the latter are Alive, the former are Dead. 'What [Baldheads and Corpses] have in common,' Erikson explicitly states, 'is that they belong to the universe of the non-living.'¹⁵ The utter incommensurability of such Monsters and Humans does not preclude their perfect equivalence. Baldheads and Corpses are not less material (or more phantasmal) than Matis. We are not dealing with spirits or any kind of supernatural being.

The masked dancers who sometimes incarnate Whipping Corpses illustrate this point. Such dancers are not Humans but Monsters; they are no longer Alive but Dead. The vernacular expression used to describe their ritual transformation is—not surprisingly—the same as the one used when somebody dies.¹⁶ The dancers' mud- and foliage-covered bodies indicate that they are revenants. Their clay masks are adorned with macaw feathers and kapok labrets. Whereas the Corpses appear at irregular intervals, their visits always coincide with the maize season.¹⁷ When the purpose is to whip disobedient children, they come in small groups of two to three. At specific occasions such as the tattoo ritual they arrive in great numbers. Remarkably, Corpses always use thorns: their whips are fitted with the spines of a particular palm, whereas tattooing happens with peach palm thorns.¹⁸ Matis people often specify that they come from ancient palm groves or from riverbank cliffs located downstream—all places closely associated with death. Yellow, red, and blue macaws inhabit these specific spots and are respectively associated with ochre, red, and black Corpses. In Matis animism Corpses eat macaws (whose meat is dark and hard) together with

a sort of resin (a black substance). All of this is repulsive but it becomes an acceptable meal from their own perspective: they see it as guan meat (which is lightly coloured and tender) and as sweet manioc (a white item). What we have is 'a principle of inversion', as Erikson calls it. 'The perception of the [Corpses] is understood as the reverse or the opposite of what is human.'¹⁹

North America—Flint Monster, Nuclear Power

Navajo animism is premised on a divide between those who dwell on earth, the *diné* or Navajo, and the *ana'i* or non-Navajo.²⁰ In this manner, Humans are opposed to Monsters. The former are associated with beauty, life, goodness, corn, and sheep, among other things. The latter, by contrast, are identified with ugliness, death, and evil. The Navajo land—that is, the land where one's kin lives, one's sheep graze, and one's corn is planted—is per definition beautiful and pure. Everything beyond its boundaries is insecure and contaminated—it is Monstrous territory. The former is where one finds *nanise*, 'growing things' or 'living things'—this includes not only human beings, cultivated plants, and livestock, but also fabrics and language. Time and again, the repeated creation and the continuous generational animation of these elements are stressed. The Navajo stimulate this 'process of continuous life' or 'giving birth', as John R. Farella describes it, through the ceremonial complex known as the blessing way or the beauty way (*hózhóóí*). But the process of continuous creation and life giving is complemented by what Farella refers to as a process of continuous death, associated with the domain of ugliness and Monstrosity.²¹

A telling illustration is the link between the uranium industry, which has boomed in the Navajo reservation since the beginning of the cold war, and Flint Monster (*yé'íitsoh*).²² This gigantic creature, so named because it is believed to have been dressed in flint armour, was a notorious man-eater who controlled all kinds of terrible weapons. Dinosaur footprints and fossils, relatively abundant in the Painted Desert region of Arizona and New Mexico, were considered to be its traces and its carcass. Fossilized scales of armoured dinosaurs are littered across the desert, which clarifies the Monster's covering with flinty scales.²³ Volcanic monoliths and bizarrely shaped sandstone rock formations were often envisaged as the petrified remains of Flint Monster and its likes. Navajos recount that in former times the Monster was challenged by the Twins, the sons of the Sun. The latter were almost killed by its thunderbolts but they were protected by their father, who gave them a whole range of fantastic arms. They attacked Flint Monster with arrows of lightning, sunbeams, and rainbows, and finally managed to destroy it in a huge explosion:

Flint flew from the monster's body, scattering over the land as he tottered and fell in the four directions, never to rise again. The boys killed and scalped their enemy, his blood flowing forth to become the

lava beds outside the Grants. The victors tossed his head away, and it became Cabezon Peak, while his bones covered the ground, forming fields of petrified wood.²⁴

In other words, Flint Monster's explosion is considered to be at the origin of some notable features of the landscape, especially of the petrified forests that dot the Colorado Plateau. Uranium is an element that dissolves and actively substitutes organic materials and is therefore often encountered in petrified trees. In effect, two large deposits of uranium have been found on the Navajo reservation: one is at Grants, New Mexico, and the other in Monument Valley, Utah. At the beginning of the atomic age, many Navajo became involved in uranium mining, a lucrative but also quite dangerous business. In the early days it was often a very amateurish affair: miners simply worked with picks and shovels. Cave-ins and accidents with explosives frequently occurred. Radioactive contamination was common. There are many clues that Navajo miners envisaged their work as unearthing the bones of Flint Monster. They were perfectly aware that the U.S. army had learnt how to use the destructive powers entrapped in them. Such things as nuclear fusion, nuclear fission, and particle beam lasers were conceived of as equivalent to the Twin's lightning, rainbow, and sunbeam weapons. The catastrophic forces so intricately described in Navajo myths, far from just echoes of a distant past, thus became uncannily contemporary. The Navajo's understanding of nuclear power on their own terms—that is, as an instance of Monstrosity—exemplifies what Gary Witherspoon has described as 'the ability of the Navajo to absorb without being absorbed'.²⁵ Novel elements have been incorporated creatively, in such a way that 'the essence and core of Navajo life and culture have not been disrupted or destroyed'.²⁶

Thunderbirds and Clowns

A key figure in Lakota animism is *wakinyan*, conventionally translated as 'Thunderbird'. The clap of thunder is its voice and lightning is its glance. Although Thunderbirds are usually hidden in the clouds, they are occasionally spotted; those who see them thereby become *heyoka*, 'Clowns'. In fact, Thunderbirds are not clearly separable from Clowns—they are two sides of the same coin. In their daily activities Clowns would maintain a close relationship with raptor birds such as hawks and eagles, which tend to soar on thermal updrafts in front of approaching thunderstorms and were envisaged as avatars of the Thunderbird. In everyday life Clowns were shunned by ordinary people, for they were thought to bring bad luck and were associated with death. Notably, the Sioux's most notorious historical leaders such as Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull, well-known from countless movies and books, were all Clowns at some point in their life. Consider the following account of a Sioux man, recorded by Bornali Halder in 1998:

[My wife and I] were coming back from a ceremony, about two-thirty, three o'clock in the morning, and it was kind of cloudy and lightning was flashing, and we were just coming down to a stop sign out here, coming from Rosebud onto the highway, and lightning flashed behind a cloud and all of a sudden I see this huge bird standing in the sky and I instantly knew what it was—that's the Thunderbird, that's the original Thunderbird. [. . .] its head was behind the clouds, and its feet were below the horizon, but I would say, based on the perspective that I was looking at it, it could be anywhere from two to five miles high. It was real high up in the sky, and its wings were hanging down like this. It was in the north, and its head, I could see by the feathers in its neck, its head was turned toward the west. So lightning flashed and I saw it, and then of course it went dark.²⁷

Lakota animism was based on the idea that those who have such an experience turn into Clowns. From then onwards, they would don ridiculous outfits: they walk around in rags, wear conical hats and false noses, or simulate baldness by putting a bladder on their head. A striking characteristic of such Clowns is that they consistently speak and act in a contrary manner. Their speech is literally inverted: they pronounce their sentences backwards. Their behaviour is similarly unconventional: they would wear their clothes inside-out or sit the other way round on a horse. In times of scarcity, a Clown would complain about how full he was. When it is extremely hot, he would shiver, put on gloves, and wrap himself in a warm blanket. Reversely, he would walk around naked when it is freezing. One ethnographer has put it thus: 'the exact opposite of normal human behaviour is the ideal sought'.²⁸ As I would put this: they engage in a contrary effort. Thunderbirds/Clowns are neither supernatural entities nor human outsiders; they are not Humans but Monsters, and they are not Alive but Dead. That is why Lakota Clowns and the deceased share so many characteristics, as I will show in chapter five.

The Northern Pacific Rim—Thunderbirds, Russian Whalers, American Missionaries

In the Bering Strait area, the Yup'ik used to be plagued by *tengmiarpiit*, giant eagle-like raptors which are presumed to nest in the craters of volcanoes.²⁹ Just like their Sioux counterparts, they are associated with thunder and therefore usually called Thunderbirds. A 19th century ethnographer described them as follows:

In ancient times there were eagles of tremendous size frequenting the tops of the highest mountains in the interior and preying upon whales and full-grown reindeer, and even upon men. A volcanic crater of very regular outline, situated upon the summit of a mountain near the Lower Yukon, was [the nest of a Thunderbird]. Around the rim of the crater

are differently-colored stones, which, the natives claim, were gathered by these birds to ornament their nest. When the birds sat there, overlooking the Yukon on the one side and the sea far away to the horizon on the other, their screams could be heard for miles, and many luckless creatures were caught in their talons and carried swiftly to their eyrie, and there torn into fragments to be devoured.³⁰

When a Yup'ik sea hunter disappeared, it was assumed that he had been carried off by a Thunderbird; people who walked on the slopes of volcanoes sometimes claimed they had seen human bones and broken kayaks, supposedly the remains of a Thunderbird's meal. In short, Thunderbirds were commonly feared and seen as very destructive. However, their appearance was not necessarily always as formidable as in the aforementioned description. In the previous chapter, I mentioned that the Yup'ik inhabitants of Alaska and Siberia used to envisage white outlanders as 'children of thunder', as opposed to 'real people'.³¹ In all likelihood, the association of Russian and American explorers and whalers with thunder has something to do with their use of firearms and cannons. Given the rather violent history of colonization, it is plausible that they were initially perceived as particular incarnations of the Thunderbird. Everything suggests that outlanders and Thunderbirds were two sides of the same coin.

In Yup'ik animism, whalers were not envisaged as Humans but as Monsters; they were not just a little bit different but radically incommensurable. If Yup'ik were Alive, Whalers were necessarily Dead. To think of them as 'foreigners' or any sort of 'other people' is misleading as it erroneously presupposes some kind of shared condition (i.e. humanity/life). To think of them as 'supernatural' is misleading, too, for they are equivalent—they are neither more spiritual/divine nor less material/tangible than the Yup'ik themselves. These claims are further supported by what befell the Moravian missionaries who came to work among the Yup'ik in the late 19th century.³² In the beginning, they were greatly feared by the local inhabitants. In part, this was caused by their Russian Orthodox competitors, who depicted them in very unfavourable terms: they maintained that the Moravians would steal their women, take over the country, and make soldiers of their boys. At that point, the Yup'ik lived in mortal terror of soldiers and therefore it should not surprise us that people at first refused to send their children to the school of the Moravian mission. We notice yet again that Monstrosity is primarily envisaged as a contrary effort rather than as an inherent feature: to act as a cruel soldier and abductor of women is the antithesis of the comportment of a 'real human being'.

Visitors, the Japanese, Giant Trout, and Christian Anthropologists

In Ainu animism, the notion of *kamuy*, which most ethnographers translate as 'deities', 'spirits', 'gods', or 'visitors', is of central importance. I will speak of Visitors, arguably the most appropriate term. Far from ephemeral,

phantasmal beings pertaining to a supernatural domain Visitors concretely manifest themselves in various material forms. The Mountain Visitor is incarnated by the bear, the Sea Visitor by the orca, the Village Visitor by the fish owl, and so forth. Some of them, such as the Willow Visitor, the Elderberry Visitor, or the Fire Visitor are embodied by the specific entities from which they derive their name.³³ Note that there is no qualitative difference between the Ainu and their Visitors: the latter are no less visible or less tangible than the former. We are dealing with perfectly equivalent shapes. Yet, these shapes are entirely incommensurable at the same time; Visitors continuously engage in what I have called a contrary effort. The predatory behaviour of bears and orcas, both of whom occasionally killed Ainu, is exemplary: it is the antithesis of appropriate Ainu conduct, which is premised on generosity and the appropriate reception of guests.

Outsiders such as the Japanese were perceived similarly. In 18th century greeting ceremonies, for example, the Ainu participants would dress formally and drink saké from lacquered cups while using the carved wooden stick which early ethnographers described as a 'moustache lifter'.³⁴ Once in a while, the sticks would be dipped in the saké to make libations to the *kamuy*. After praising the Ainu for working so hard during the fishing season, Japanese officials would read out new edicts. According to one contemporaneous observer, the Ainu reacted to these edicts 'similar to the way we [the Japanese] react when we pay reverence to Shinto gods or the Buddha'.³⁵ Another observer literally stated that Japanese officials were like 'living gods' to them.³⁶ Their treatment of the Japanese thus mirrored that of the *kamuy* during the special ceremonies dedicated to them. Arguably, the Japanese were Visitors; even though they were often designated with a more specific term (*shisam*), there are many clues that their specific mode of operation was seen as a contrary effort. One indication is that the Ainu, who would always cook their food thoroughly, used to find the Japanese custom of eating raw food abhorrent. The Japanese were neither 'supernatural' nor 'other people'. Their conduct was evidently non-Ainu/non-Human; they were Monsters.

A notable feature of Ainu animism is the Giant Trout upon whose back the world rests. Whenever the Trout moves, an earthquake follows. When it sucks water in the ebb of the tide takes place, and when it empties its mouth the tide flows. The blow of its breath causes tidal waves and flash-floods. Just like its Chachi counterpart, the Water Dragon, it is an incorrigible man-eater:

[T]his mighty trout was in the habit, not only of swallowing animals, such as deer and bears that might come to the shores of the lake to drink, but would also swallow men, women, and children; nay, not only so, but even whole boats full of people!³⁷

What is significant for the present investigation is that John Batchelor, the anthropologist and preacher who wrote these lines at the beginning of the

previous century, was attributed the same catastrophe-provoking properties. He writes:

[Ainu wizards] told the people that the late great floods in Yezo (1898) were owing to the presence of myself as a teacher of Christianity, and were sent as a punishment to the Ainu for some of them having adopted the Christian religion. Epidemic diseases too have been set down to a like cause.³⁸

Clearly, the Giant Trout and the Christian Anthropologist were conceived of as two sides of the same coin—both were manifestations of Monstrosity. In this case, the contrary effort is the generation of disaster and leading a Christian lifestyle. If the Ainu are Alive, the Trout and the Anthropologist are Dead. We are confronted with Humans and Monsters, that is, with equivalent but incommensurable shapes.

Southern Asia—Devourers, the Malays, the Chinese, the Master of Lightning, the Rainbow

Batek and Chewong forest dwellers of the Malay Peninsula share a mild obsession with inveterate man-eaters whom they call *hala* and *bas*, respectively.³⁹ I translate both terms as ‘Devourers’. They are identified with outsiders such as Malays, Chinese, or Whites and are frequently described as dressed in festoons of leaves and flowers. But Devourers are also envisaged as various kinds of dangerous animals, for they are deemed to have the capacity to metamorphose. Kirk Endicott writes: ‘[Devourers can assume any] physical embodiment they might desire, even wind and rain. When they appear on earth it is usually in the form of a person, tiger, elephant, snake, or rhinoceros.’⁴⁰ However they look, their culinary habits make them the antithesis of everything that any respectable Batek would consider honourable demeanour; they engage in what I refer to as a contrary effort. Although they crave raw human flesh, Devourers are not seen as bad in themselves, for their behaviour is assumed to result from a confusion of perspectives: they see people as pigs. That is, they do not perceive themselves as cannibals but as eaters of legitimate food. Signe Howell calls this ‘the principle of differential perception’.⁴¹ The crucial point is that the status of Devourer is not an absolute one. Depending on the perspective, one is either Devourer or Chewong, non-Human or Human. These respective positions correspond to incommensurable but equivalent shapes. In other words, Devourers are neither ‘other people’ nor ‘spirits’ but Monsters.

In Batek animism, two of the most powerful Devourers are the Master of Lightning and the Rainbow Dragon.⁴² The Master of Lightning is associated with thunderstorms and resides in the upper world. Thunder is his voice and lightning is his reflection. Very often, he is pictured as releasing the wind and rain from caves in a stone pillar, a reference to the limestone

outcroppings in the jungle that are among the most impressive landmarks of the area. In addition, he is commonly conflated with the ‘the raja of tigers’, the chief of the tiger-people who ‘have human form in their own village [the stone pillar], but change into tiger form whenever they leave it’.⁴³ The Rainbow Dragon is associated with floods and landslides and lives in the underworld; she is conceived as a giant ‘turtle-snake’ that supports the earth. Endicott describes her as follows:

[The Rainbow Dragon is] an enormous snake, about the size of a train. [It] is coloured red on its back, yellow on its belly, and green in between. Its clothing is made of gold, with which it is always associated. The rainbow is [its] shadow or reflection.⁴⁴

Such Dragons may also assume less fantastic appearances. Just as tigers are avatars of the Master of Lightning, ordinary snakes and all kinds of animals that inhabit rivers or pools are said to be incarnations of the Rainbow Dragon. Even fantastic beings such as the Master of Lightning and the Rainbow Dragon are equivalent with Humans. In their guise as Tigers or Snakes, they are every bit as material and every bit as visible as the Batek themselves. They must be understood as Monsters rather than as supernatural beings. Batek people endlessly go on about the fact that Dragons and their likes eat their food raw and do not use fire. What they refer to is, in my terminology, a contrary effort. And all varieties of Devourers are incommensurable with Humans; there is no common ground whatsoever. If the Chewong are Alive, the Malays and the Chinese must be Dead. If the Batek are Alive, Tigers and Snakes are necessarily Dead.

Absorbers, European and Asian Seafarers, Suckling Infants

In Onge animism, the winds and *tomya* or *lau*—conventionally translated as ‘the spirits’ but from here onwards referred to as Absorbers—are closely associated, to the point of being indistinguishable.⁴⁵ The winds blow in from different directions throughout the year and each season is named after the particular Absorber associated with those respective movements. The world is divided between Ongees and Absorbers. The latter lead exactly the same sort of life as the former, at least from their own viewpoint. Vishvajit Pandya writes: ‘The [Absorbers], like the Ongees, come to the island to hunt and gather and take the limited food resources of the island, thus making food either available or unavailable’.⁴⁶ That is the reason why food is subject to seasonal variations; it also explains the regular translocations. When the Absorbers hunt turtles at sea—which happens during yearly recurring cyclones—the Ongees move to the interior forest. When they hunt jungle pigs, the Ongees return to the coast.⁴⁷ In short, Humans always go where Absorbers are not active—the latter are in a sense inverted Ongees. The opposition is often expressed with reference to the ability to

chew. Absorbers are conceived of as jawbone-less and therefore cannot masticate. The Ongee, as we have seen, primarily envisage themselves as masticators. For them, the essence of Humanity is to chew. Because of their lack of lower teeth Absorbers prefer soft and liquid food such as honey or fruits, items which are indeed referred to as 'spirit-food'.⁴⁸ Such dietary habits amount to a contrary effort.

Smell and weight are other key criteria of distinction. Unlike human beings, Absorbers do not emit smell. Instead, they absorb it. The release of smell, Pandya shows, always implies a change of position: '... by absorbing the smell of humans the [Absorbers] transform humans into [Absorbers]'.⁴⁹ This is a dangerous thing to happen which mostly results in the death of the smell emitter. That is why Ongees are so meticulous about applying clay paint, wearing bone ornaments, and carrying fire everywhere they go; these are all strategies to protect them from the movements of the wind, that is, from having one's smell absorbed.⁵⁰ In sum, to keep one's smell is essential. Maintaining one's weight is equally important. Ongees, so it is said, are heavy and hence can only move on the horizontal axis. Absorbers, on the other hand, are light and this allows them to travel both on earth and in the sky.⁵¹ Releasing smell and losing weight are in fact two ways of expressing the same thing: both refer to a metamorphosis from masticators into jawless Absorbers, from humans into winds, from the living into the dead. The equation of Absorbers and the Dead is explicit, as we shall see further onwards in some detail.

Finally, I mention two similar equations: that between Absorbers and alien seafarers, and that between Absorbers and suckling infants. According to A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, the term *lau* denotes 'spirits' but is also used in reference to non-Ongee visitors.⁵² The Indians and Burmese whom Ongees occasionally saw in the penal settlement of Port Blair were designated with that expression. The same term also used to be applied to Europeans:

For many centuries the Andaman Islanders have been accustomed to see light-skinned men visit their shores in ships, Europeans, natives from the coasts of India, Burma and Malaya and occasionally perhaps Chinese. To these aliens they gave the name of *lau*, apparently regarding them as visitors from the only other world they knew of, the world of spirits.⁵³

Such outsiders were associated with anger and were deemed homologous to the smell-absorbing, boneless spirits known as *tomya*.⁵⁴ It is no coincidence that both are identified with stones protruding from the sea, i.e. with 'light' stones that fail to sink. They stand in contrast to the Ongee themselves who—as indicated before—envisage themselves as 'heavy', at least in ordinary circumstances. The Ongee have always been very careful to demarcate this boundary. That is why they made a point of eviscerating the corpses of settlers who intruded on their land during the violent early years of contact. To cut into a body and to remove bones, Pandya

explains, is both an expression of anger and an effort to make the intruder 'light'.⁵⁵ Foetuses and babies are also conceived of as spirits or, as I prefer to call them, Absorbers. After all, they nurture themselves exclusively with soft and liquid food, just like jawless Absorbers. In fact, babies are not considered Human until the first teeth in the lower jaw have appeared. At that moment, Pandya explains, 'the child (once a spirit) loses the need to move along with the spirits and winds because, like other humans, he can now masticate food'.⁵⁶ To speak of Monsters instead of 'spirits' is perhaps less confusing, because Alien Seafarers and Suckling Infants are perfectly equivalent to Ongees. Absorbers and Humans are equally tangible.

Africa—Hoofed Ones, Arab Slave Raiders

Uduk animism is based on the idea of a world where there is a 'continuing defensive struggle of humankind against the wild', as Wendy James has expressed it.⁵⁷ The notions of *arum* and *bunyan*, which I translate as Hoofed Ones and Slave Raiders, are crucial in this respect. Everything beyond the immediate realm of the home, especially hoofed animals such as gazelles and antelopes but also the deceased, is in some way *arum*, a Hoofed One. They tend to reside underground, in holes in the bush or underwater, usually near places where a hunter was killed or a fisherman has drowned. James provides the illustration of a river where a deep and wide pool forms in the wet season. In that specific spot one may expect to hear lowing, bleating, barking, and crowing, all from beneath the water. Hoofed Ones, so it is told, have cattle, goats, dogs, and chickens just like the Uduk. In fact, they perceive themselves as humans: they live in villages, share food and drink, and so forth.⁵⁸ The notion of *arum* is also used with regards to all sorts of inimical outsiders. Their former Nuer foes (who migrated into their direction during the 19th century) are referred to as 'those hoofed folk'.⁵⁹ They were not human but wild, and therefore deserved to be speared. Moreover, they were called after a certain kind of antelope, the *topi*.⁶⁰ Very similar connotations are attached to the notion of *bunyan*, which primarily refers to the Arab sheikhs and slave raiders who terrorized the Uduk well into the first half of the 20th century.⁶¹ Many elderly people still had vivid memories of such attacks in the 1960s, when James interviewed them. One man testified:

In the past, people did not live a settled life at home. People were chased by the [Slave Raiders]. . . . People were just running about. People were just running in the bush like antelopes, on and on, on and on like that, running about in the bush. Meals were never eaten at all. People were eating wild things in the forest. They only had wild roots which they dug up to eat.⁶²

Another man remembered an attack near a mountain called Jebel Borfa:

People thought the wind was blowing, because the [Slave Raiders'] mules were going *tukutukutukutuku* . . . People said, 'What's making that noise?'—while the [Slave Raiders] surrounded everyone. People were just escaping like antelopes—*buw, buw, buw*.⁶³

The analogy with a typical large-scale hunt, during which the pursuers surround an area of forest and gradually close in, is explicit. James mentions that the *buw* sound expresses the bounding movement of the animals attempting to leap out of the circle. The association between slaves and hoofed animals recurs time and again. One elder recounted how Slave Raiders besieged the Uduk who were hiding in caves near the top of Jebel Bisho. The Raiders had built a thorn fence at the foot of that mountain, thus encircling them. Eventually the Uduk made a dash for it and some escaped through the stockade. Our elder recalls: 'From the top of the mountain people were jumping down like gazelles, from right up there: *puur-thuku'b! puur-thuku'b!*'⁶⁴ The latter sound, James underlines, suggests 'the bounding movements of gazelles, their hoofs punctuating the leaps downhill'.⁶⁵

All this indicates that Uduk and Raiders were assumed to have radically different points of view. In the context of slave-raiding, the former perceived themselves as antelopes that were being chased (just like Hoofed Ones, they hid in holes in the earth), whereas the Arabs were presumed to conceive of the situation as one where they were rounding up goats and cattle. In other words, the latter saw themselves as ordinary Uduk, as Humans. What the Uduk perceived as killing game, the Raiders envisaged as herding domestic animals. The practice of capturing slaves was not so much conceived of as an intentionally malicious activity but as an accident caused by incompatible perspectives. It also supports the insight that Humanity is never guaranteed: one can suddenly end up as a Hoofed One, the aggressed can turn into one of the aggressors. In the next chapter, I discuss this kind of metamorphoses in more depth. Here, my suggestion is that Slave Raiders and Hoofed Ones were neither 'other people' nor 'supernatural beings'; rather, they must be understood as Monsters. As such, they are perfectly equivalent to but also entirely incommensurable with the Uduk. Their aggressive conduct and their murderous proclivities were obvious contrary efforts. Strictly speaking, Hoofed Ones and Slave Raiders were not Alive but Dead.

Hunting and Bee-Keeping Monsters, Forest Dwellers without Cattle

To conclude, I focus on how Samburu and Maasai herders perceive those with whom they are not immediately familiar, in particular the Okiek. In the anthropological literature, the latter are described as foraging people inhabiting the central highland forests that are interspersed among open woodlands and plains, the terrain of pastoral peoples such as the Samburu and the Maasai. They have a reputation as expert hunters who use bows and arrows and poison-tipped spears to kill all kinds of game, from the smallest

dik-dik antelope to elephants. But all ethnographers agree that bee-keeping is even more central to the Okiek: besides gathering wild honey, they make hives themselves from hollowed-out logs, which they place high up in trees. One observer has calculated that Okiek people expend up to fifty times more time and effort for a pound of honey than for a pound of meat.⁶⁶ Pastoralists call the Okiek 'Dorobo', a pejorative term which denotes the disgraceful state of 'lacking cattle'. Of course, the Samburu and the Maasai primarily perceive themselves as 'people-of-cattle', as mentioned in the previous chapter. From their point of view, the Dorobo are 'worthless' and 'mean'. They 'live in the forest like baboons', whereas Maa-speaking herders regard hunting and its concomitant lifestyle as beneath them.⁶⁷ These various grievances arguably express the same thing: the Dorobo persistently engage in a contrary effort. Consider the following quote:

[I]f the Dorobo did not exist as real people, their symbolic role would likely be matched by imaginary beings much like them. [There] is a more general concern which expresses negatively, and here through the Dorobo, what it is to be human. Of course, what counts as being fully human is swayed by perception of the activities which it is held to be most worthy for human beings to pursue; since the Dorobo do not farm or herd, their humanity is questionable in the eyes of those who do.⁶⁸

Michael Kenny, who wrote these lines, hits the nail on the head: the pastoralists envisage their hunting and bee-keeping neighbours as anything but Human. The Dorobo are not conceived of as 'other people' but as non-Humans. Bee-keepers are not just a little bit different from cattle-breeders, but radically so. We are not talking about diverse categories of humans or about different 'cultures' or 'societies', as those who adhere to the Western cosmology assume too rapidly, but about incommensurable shapes that are at the same time equivalent. In short, the Dorobo are Monsters. This implies that they are not defined by any essential characteristic but by what John Galaty has termed an 'anti-praxis' and what I have referred to as a contrary effort.⁶⁹ Consuming honey and hunted meat are opposed to herding cattle and subsisting on its milk. As Samburu herders express it, the Dorobo lack the crucial 'cuts' that distinguish their own group; and this does not only pertain to eating practices but also to beaded ornaments and appropriate clothing.⁷⁰ Galaty underlines that Maasai envisage the pastoral/hunting distinction as 'the most fundamental' one and he adds that the self-designation *maasai* is used most frequently in contrast to non-Maasai.⁷¹ Converted in my own terminology, this means that the dichotomy between Humans and Monsters, Maasai and Dorobo, is a central aspect of how herders deal with the unfamiliar in Maa animism.

A last point I wish to make is that the Dorobo are neither clearly distinguished from other outcasts such as blacksmiths or diviners, nor from what ethnographers commonly label 'evil spirits'. For instance, they are

sometimes envisaged as earth-gnomes skilled in the art of iron-working, living in caves and villages underground. They are suspected to be cannibals who chase people unrelentingly and appear in many tales as trickster-transformers.⁷² In an animistic context where there are neither ‘other people’ nor ‘supernatural beings’ this does not come as a surprise.

ANIMISM IS NOT RELIGION

Through this comparative exercise something of the peculiarity of the Western cosmology becomes apparent. It emerges that one of its pillars—modern anthropology—is premised on a curiously inclusive notion of humanity. That is, the status of ‘human being’ is generously attributed without any particular conditions. By now it has become clear that apparently straightforward concepts such as ‘foreigner’ or ‘stranger’ are inadequate to grasp how so-called indigenous people conceive—or at least used to conceive—of such unfamiliar characters. The more general idea of ‘other people’ is similarly misleading, because it inadvertently presupposes a minimal degree of commensurability. Indeed, such concepts always contain a tacit supposition: foreigners may be different, but only *just a little bit*. Beyond the differences in culture, there is always a shared nature—a common humanity. The possibility of total incommensurability, i.e. of understanding those unfamiliar characters as *very* different is something that modern anthropologists are apparently incapable or unwilling to imagine. In itself, this would not be such a problem were it not for their persistent habit of projecting their own incapability on the people they study.

Notwithstanding all their insistence on taking into account cultural specificity, many latter-day anthropologists (or, more precisely, many of those unversed in Amazonian anthropology) not only firmly believe in foreigners, they ironically enough also tend to assume that the idea is universal. Insofar as they impute the idea of ‘other people’ to so-called indigenous people, they depict them, in effect, in their own image, that is, as (somewhat imperfect) anthropologists. In this chapter I have shown that this approach is patronizing, for it fails to do justice to the originality and the sophistication of animism. And it systematically underestimates its no-nonsense quality. Saying that ‘the supernatural’ is particularly prominent in indigenous societies turns out to be a rather gross misrepresentation. We have learnt that divinities and humans are (or at least used to be) perfectly equivalent. It is indeed more precise to speak of Monsters and Humans, as we are dealing with distinct shapes that continuously have to be maintained. To depict animism as a form of religion (or some immature manifestation of it) is therefore deceptive.

Throughout this chapter I have casually repeated one little phrase, without giving much specification: if Humans are Alive, Monsters are Dead. If Chachi are Alive, Guerrilla-Fighters are Dead. If Lakota are Alive, Clowns

are Dead. If Ongees are Alive, European Seafarers are Dead. If Uduk are Alive, Arab Slave Raiders are Dead. It must be emphasized that this clear distinction is not trivial. The radical incommensurability between those who are Human and those who are not is actually at the core of any form of animism: Humans and Monsters have absolutely *nothing* in common, not even 'life'. To be sure, Monsters are as animate as Humans (we are talking about equivalent shapes after all) but that does not imply that they are Alive. All this may sound strange, but that is only because of the confusion between the 'animate' and 'life', which adherents of the Western cosmology have so effectively propagated. In the chapters that follow, I will expound the roots of this entrenched confusion in more depth. For now, it suffices to repeat the key insight that the modern anthropological notion of humanity is oddly inclusive, at least in comparison with the restricted notions of Humanity that are remarkably uniform and surprisingly stable in so-called indigenous societies all over the world.

What I aim to show next is that the modern biological notion of 'life' is not less strange than the modern anthropological notion of 'humanity'. In fact, both concepts have much more in common than has been recognized so far. For one thing, I would suggest that life as it is known in the Western cosmology is incongruously inclusive too. Just as humanity is denied an equally worthy negative and therefore acquires an unmistakably inflated character ('cultural diversity'), life is built on the assumption that there is no negative to it and can therefore only be conceived of as incredibly varied ('biological diversity'). Our continuing focus on animism will elucidate that these respective conceptions are in fact far from self-evident.

3 Beasts

An Argument Against Wildlife

If we pass to Sumatra, we shall find that the veneration paid by the Malays to the tiger, and their habit of apologizing to it when a trap is laid, is connected with the idea of tigers being animated by the souls of departed men.

—Edward B. Tylor (2010b [1871]: 211)

What I am sure about, because we know it from ethnography, is that people do not always agree on what is alive and what is not, and that even when they do agree it might be for entirely different reasons.

—Tim Ingold (2011: 67)

Yet another seemingly improbable claim is put forward in this chapter: it is suggested that the very idea of ‘wildlife’ is or, at least used to be, inconceivable for so-called indigenous people. Not unlike the notion of ‘other people’, the notion of ‘other living beings’ is actually of fairly recent origin, akin to such colonial import items as the horse or the shotgun. Within animism it is more apt to speak of ‘wild-dead’ given that those who inhabit the wilds always pertain to the domain of death. Lucid observations such as Tylor’s about the link between tigers and the departed, I suggest, have not received the credit they deserve.

QUESTIONING THE IDEA OF ‘OTHER LIVING BEINGS’

We have already seen that the notion of ‘other people’ is irrelevant within animism. The present chapter aims to show that the same goes, more widely, for ‘other living beings’. But this task will be complicated by some of the ingrained beliefs of the Western cosmology. For a long time, the adherents of that cosmology have promoted the idea that there is such a thing as ‘other living beings’. Of course, they do not always use that exact expression for they have introduced a whole range of alternatives and specifications: ‘wildlife’, ‘natural species’, ‘life in all its diversity’, ‘animals’, ‘plants’, and so forth. When it comes to smuggling such curious concoctions into the public sphere, their cunningness is endless. What is more, they have also disseminated a strange kind of distinction between life and death. In the Western cosmology, life and death overlap with the animate and the inert, respectively. That is, life and death are taken to be different in kind; they are assumed to be separated by some kind of irreducible qualitative

difference. This gulf is clearly reflected in the architecture of modern academic institutions. Whereas the first has been accorded its own field of enquiry (the 'life sciences') the second is not deemed worthy of that distinction. No university has a department of 'death sciences'. Taking Chachi animism as my starting point, I show that this situation is actually far from self-evident.

Chachi people can teach us a thing or two about what adherents of the Western cosmology refer to as 'wild animals'. Nobody disputes that their knowledge of the forest and its inhabitants is impressive. As mentioned before, hunting is one of the activities they value most. 'Hispanics raise chickens, Chachi hunt' is an often heard catchphrase, highlighting the contrast between Amerindian and non-Amerindian inhabitants of the river Cayapas area. A principal reason why the Chachi have built their villages near the headwaters of rivers, and only very rarely at the coastline, is their wish to have good hunting grounds in all directions. The Chachi's propensity to hunt was already noticed at the beginning of the 19th century by the British traveller William Butler Stevenson, who mentions the use of spears to kill peccaries and blowpipes to shoot monkeys and birds. By the time the American ethnographer Samuel A. Barrett arrived in the early 20th century shotguns had already begun to overtake their more traditional arms. Nowadays, deforestation and over-hunting have taken their toll and in some areas there is almost no game left. However, the villages that border on the Cotacachi-Cayapas nature reserve have mostly been spared from such devastations.

A hunter from one such village, Armando Añapa (who was my host), one day came home with a toucan he had just killed in the forest. Not that he would admit it. As always, he remained very reticent concerning his hunting practices. He neither announced his departure nor specified the kind of prey he intended to pursue. Instead, he would quietly set off, early in the morning, ideally unnoticed. At most, he would utter a platitude such as 'I am going for a walk' or 'I am going to check something out'. When he returned from a successful hunt, he scrupulously avoided to boast. On that one occasion, the toucan went into the cooking pot without further ado. At the time, I did not know that this attitude is actually quite common in animistic societies throughout South America.¹ It intrigued me that my host would never say 'I am going to kill this or that animal'. Even after the fact, he would never spontaneously confirm that he actually 'killed' his prey. In his phraseology, he simply 'encountered' it. To be sure, when I pressed hard he would occasionally use the Spanish verb *matar*, to kill, but this obviously went against the grain. Sometimes he referred to the hunt as a process of seduction and such a description is indeed fairly accurate. To stay with our example, toucans are effectively lured by blowing on a specific kind of leaf, which reproduces their call.

Initially, I thought that this apparently euphemistic treatment of the act of killing was some kind of hypocritical tactic to avoid a bad conscience. I

now realize this was entirely mistaken. To understand why, it is useful to consider the following observation about toucans:

It is said that in ancient times birds and mammals had the power of speech, their language being that of the [Chachi]. The toucan wore a silver necklace, and was constantly crying because there was no *chonta dura* [peach palm fruit] to eat, although there was an abundance of other fruits. When he changed from his human form to his present bird form, his silver necklace became the white rim of feathers, which he now has, at the yellow throat patch, and his former crying for *chonta dura* he still keeps up in his constant propensity to give his characteristic call, '*tcando'to*', from which he derives his onomatopoeic name. [In the vernacular, toucans are called *chaandutu*.]²

This is a quote from Samuel A. Barrett, the aforementioned ethnographer who conducted extended fieldwork among the Chachi at the beginning of the 20th century. Anthropologists usually shelve this kind of account under the rubric of 'myth'. To be fair, they tend to treat such stories with a sympathetic eye, but they are nevertheless considered improbable in the end. Those who recounted their version of the toucan-myth to Barrett, in contrast, never give the impression that they find anything unlikely about it. Why is it, then, that adepts of the Western cosmology think of myths as inherently improbable? Here is a preliminary hypothesis.

In the example, the root of the confusion is that those who are under the sway of the Western cosmology envisage toucans as 'living beings'—as 'wildlife'. They uncritically assume that these birds are *just a little bit* different from humans. To be sure, they recognize the difference between toucans and people. Yet, this difference is never total. Both are supposed to share the same basic condition, both are thought to be *alive*. In the Western cosmology, life is the common ground between wildlife and humans, between toucans and Chachi. In other words, they are taken to be at least minimally commensurable. We will see that animists effectively discard this kind of reasoning as a ridiculous form of superstition. For them, it is obvious that toucans and Chachi are *radically* different. For them, it is clear that we are not dealing with partly overlapping classes or categories, but with incommensurable shapes, with Toucans and Humans (as usual, I capitalize when I refer to shapes). Animism is premised on the axiom that Toucans and Humans have *nothing* in common. If the latter are Alive, the former are Dead. This will sound strange to adherents of the modern Western cosmology and therefore it is worth repeating: Toucans are Dead. Consequently, it is incongruous to call them 'living beings' or even 'animals'. Because they are shapes, however, Toucans and Humans are also entirely equivalent. This implies that the former are not less animate (material, visible, etc.) than the latter. So Toucans are animate but not Alive. Obviously, this conception clashes with one of the Western cosmology's foundational

dogmas, namely that ‘life’ and ‘the animate’ are by and large synonymous. But how to designate creatures that are simultaneously animate and Dead? I propose to call them ‘Beasts’.

Whereas this explanation is far too sketchy to be entirely satisfactory, it does offer us a clue as to why Chachi hunters like Armando are so reluctant to use the expression ‘to kill’. The idea needs further investigation, but we could reasonably ask: how can one kill something that is already Dead? The language animists use to describe their hunting endeavours may turn out to be less flowery than is often imagined. In any case, the present chapter entirely focusses on Beasts, entities that are neither ‘wildlife’ nor ‘other living beings’. More particularly, I will examine them in the context of hunting, which requires that I specify the role of predators and prey. Actually, I should write ‘Predator’ and ‘Prey’, for these respective positions refer to contrary efforts—eating and being eaten—as will be documented at length throughout this chapter. I will make the case that Predator and Prey do not share any common ground (the biologists’ ‘life’). Rather, they correspond to incommensurable shapes. What remains to be discussed properly is that most intriguing property of shapes: the fact that they can shift. Shapes are positional qualities, unlike the fixed classes and categories of the modern Western cosmology. That is why the protagonist in Barrett’s account is able to adopt two positions: Toucan and Chachi, Beast and Human, Dead and Alive. However, to speak about metamorphosis is still a little precocious at the moment. The theme will be introduced gradually in what follows and is treated in more depth in the second part of the book.

BEASTS AS SHAPES, PREDATOR AND PREY

In this section, I will mainly refer to what I learnt from one particularly unflappable animist. Whereas Grandma Estela was our principal guide in the previous chapter, this time I will mostly rely on Armando Añapa, the senior hunter briefly mentioned above.

Peccaries

One morning in July 2004 Armando Añapa succeeded to shoot four white-lipped peccaries (*avendyushu*). This was a bit of an exploit, for Chachi hunters consider such bush-pigs as their most challenging prey. White-lipped peccaries (henceforth ‘peccaries’) roam the forest in herds of up to one hundred. Experienced hunters like Armando regularly examine peccary paths to check whether a herd has recently passed. They know exactly where their favourite quagmires are located (peccaries love to wallow in the mud) and often search in the surroundings. Peccary herds are relatively rarely spotted; in general they only appear every three to four months. All hunters I spoke to acknowledge that they are extremely cunning. Several

insisted that peccaries realize that human hunters read their tracks. To avoid leaving behind traces, they allegedly often run away over hard rocks and in streamlets. Sometimes they mislead the hunter with diversionary tactics. They may run away in a wide circle, for instance. Thus, the pursuer thinks they are going one way but in fact they are going in the opposite direction. In sum, Armando had accomplished no mean feat but afterwards he nevertheless remained his modest self. He was rightfully gleaming with pride, but would never bluntly say 'I killed all these peccaries'. In fact, he anxiously avoided to mention the act of 'killing' at all. Why?

Initially, I assumed that his reluctance to speak about killing his prey was due to a repression of some deep feelings of guilt. But I soon realized that my half-baked psycho-analytical theory was beside the point. Under the spell of the Western cosmology, I erroneously presumed that peccaries are 'wildlife'. That is, I believed that peccaries and humans had a common denominator, namely *being alive*; I envisaged peccaries as 'other living beings'. Moreover, I also projected this view onto Armando and Chachi hunters in general: surely, I reasoned, the latter must think of peccaries as alive? That move, I now realize, was unfortunate. As it turns out, peccaries or—more precisely—Peccaries (for animism always operates in terms of shapes) are Dead. To be sure, staunch animists such as Armando would agree that Peccaries are animate; he would even insist that they are as clever as Chachi. But that does not imply that they are Alive. Unlike the naïve acolyte of the Western cosmology I was at the time, somebody like Armando would never make the mistake of confusing the animate with life. Within animism, Hunter and Peccary—Predator and Prey—are always equivalent but incommensurable shapes. If one is Alive, the other is necessarily Dead. From Armando's viewpoint, Peccaries are indeed animate but Dead: they are Beasts.

A key property of Beasts is that they are rather difficult to kill, for they are already Dead. But if 'killing' them is impossible, how to understand what happens during the hunt? Initially I had discarded it as insignificant, but after his exploit Armando did mumble something about washing clothes. Upon enquiry, it emerged that just before the successful hunt he had dreamt about washing clothes in the river, which is considered a good omen. In fact, it is explicitly thought to refer to the slaughtering of peccaries, the clothes being analogous to the skins (which are stripped off in the river). What occurred is a change of perspective: Peccaries were perceived as Chachi, Beasts as Human. Actually, it is never entirely sure who is who in the forest; it is said that those who view Peccaries as Chachi must be Peccaries themselves. This basic uncertainty is perhaps the single most important characteristic of the hunt. If we accept that predation is a specific effort that continuously has to be maintained rather than a fixed attribute, this does not come as a surprise. The position of Predator is never taken for granted; rather, it is a perpetual struggle. Who ends up as Prey is never known in advance. Armando always insisted that such hunts are not without risk and

that peccaries have been known to attack and badly wound their pursuers. That is, Peccaries may emerge as Predators and Chachi end up as Prey.

What ultimately matters, I would suggest, is that the Hunter *keeps in shape*. That this is not self-evident is testified by the abundance of accounts such as this one:

A hunter who once upon a time lived in *Tutsá*, the ancient village of the Chachi, was particularly skilled in spearing peccaries. However, female peccaries appeared to him as beautiful women. Sometimes they took him to their houses and made love. Thus, that Chachi became more and more peccary-like. He began to speak with them (for peccaries have a language of their own) and after a while he was so fluent that he could even understand their jokes. The way peccaries were organised showed close parallels with the Chachi manner, because they also had 'leaders' or Governors (*uñis*) who went ahead, whereas the rest of the herd followed them. At a certain point, the hunter did not come home anymore and remained with the peccaries. He was now completely transformed into a bush-pig, except for one detail. Peccary paths were full of thorns and spines which hurt his feet. As his hoofs were not fully developed yet, the peccaries decided to buy him shoes. Meanwhile, the human family of the lost hunter engaged a shaman to bring him back. The latter decided to set up a trap. He called the herd on the plaza in front of the church of *Tutsá* and made the whole surface very slippery. When the peccaries arrived, they all fell down. The Chachi could pull out their man and in this way he was rescued.

Time and again, it emerges that Chachi and Peccary, Human and Beast, Predator and Prey, are positional qualities rather than undisputed givens. We are not talking about species but about shapes. Therefore, hunting never amounts to a 'killing' but rather to a change of shapes, a metamorphosis.

Monkeys

Early one morning, Armando and I set out to hunt monkeys near the Cotacachi-Cayapas nature reserve. We paddled upstream and left our canoe at the bank of a streamlet. Once we had entered the forest, my host regularly stopped and watched carefully. He paid particular attention to certain trees, especially those whose fruit is eaten by monkeys. Armando pointed me to the spoor and excretions of spider monkeys, anteaters, and armadillos. We also heard the cries of various kinds of birds. However, he took little interest in all this and instead concentrated on finding howler monkeys (*juyungu*). Each time we reached a hilltop he imitated their very loud and distinctive call with admirable precision. After many failed attempts, we finally managed to track down a small group. Most of them remained out of reach as they were sitting very high in the canopy, but Armando did

manage to shoot two. Afterwards, he asked me whether I had noticed anything. I had not. 'Didn't you see how the monkeys on the higher branches furiously jumped up and down?' Of course I did, but that had not struck me as exceptional. I had assumed that it was the normal behaviour of monkeys in a situation of distress. However, Armando did not doubt that there was more to it than simply panic: 'they were shaking the tree,' he cryptically stated, 'they were attempting to let us fall'. Later, he explained that the howler monkeys perceived themselves as Chachi walking on the ground, whereas they viewed *us* as monkeys sitting in a tree. In other words, *they* were trying to hunt us, as much as we were trying to hunt them.

Once again, we see that Predator and Prey, Hunter and Howler Monkey, are positional qualities rather than stable identities. Once again, we are confronted with equivalent but incommensurable shapes. Equivalent because both are equally animate; incommensurable because if one is Alive, the other is necessarily Dead. As mentioned before, Armando would not confuse the animate with life. From his viewpoint, the Monkeys are clearly animate but not Alive; in other words, they are neither 'animals' nor 'other living beings' but Beasts. Whereas Predators are always Alive, their Prey is necessarily Dead. If Humans are Alive, Howler Monkeys are Dead. The problem is that one can never be certain about who is Predator; likewise, who ends up as Prey always remains in suspense. Like any shape, that of Predator requires constant maintenance; one has to sustain a specific effort. Within animism, the only certainty is that complacency is fatal. If one does not hunt, one will be hunted; if one does not eat, one will be eaten. Actually, all this amounts to what I have repeated time and again: if one is Human and one wants to remain so, it is essential to *keep in shape*. In our example, the Hunter must avoid turning into a Monkey. The danger is not death in the sense of total annihilation, but metamorphosis.

Little surprise, then, that the theme is so ubiquitous in many of the stories that Chachi people love to recount. Consider this example:

A woman from *Tutsá*, the ancient village of the Chachi, encountered a man in the forest. She fell in love and married him. The husband took her to his house, a huge *mascarey* tree which they climbed via a liana, but to them it appeared like a house which they entered via a ladder. What the woman did not realize was that her husband was actually a spider monkey. The husband's family treated her well enough and gave her cooked maize to eat. At least, that was how she perceived it, for it really was just a piece of tree fruit. Her father-in-law appeared like an *uñi*, a Chachi Governor, but in fact he was a howler monkey (a more impressive species in terms of size). They had a child together, and occasionally went to visit the woman's parents. Once, she brought a basket full of nappies and clothes for the baby but when her mother had a closer look it turned out to be merely skins of snakes, felines and deer—from a spider monkey's perspective these were proper clothes. Here, the woman's parents

presumed that their daughter had married a monkey. Soon afterwards, they were struck by the extremely hairy hands of the son-in-law, which confirmed their suspicions. Exposed, the son-in-law but also his wife and baby instantly shifted into their monkey form and dashed off. The mother of the woman tried to follow them, but when they climbed the *mascarey* tree she could not follow. For her, the liana was no ladder. Thus, those Chachi parents lost their daughter.

The example illustrates that seduction is quite comparable to predation. It is no coincidence that Chachi hunters who use techniques of imitation envisage their undertaking as much as an act of seduction as one of predation. Once more, we see that Chachi and Monkey, Human and Beast, designate positional qualities rather than ontological categories. Just like Prey and Predator, Seducer and Seduced must be understood as incommensurable but equivalent shapes.

Felines

One of the things that particularly struck me on my first visit to Armando's house was a yellow pelt with black spots hanging from a rafter. It was the skin of a jaguar (*kela*), which my host had shot shortly before my arrival. He told me it had been a coincidence, for he had not been looking for it. One night he went fishing with a lamp, an activity locally known as *mariscar*. Apparently, the jaguar was curious and came towards the riverbank because it was attracted by the light. Shooting a big feline may be fairly exceptional but it does occur once in a while. Mostly, it happens while tracking collared peccaries or deer, their favourite prey. When hunters imitate such prey to lure it closer this sometimes (unintentionally) attracts pumas or jaguars. Smaller felines such as ocelots and jaguarondis, constant menaces for people's chickens, are shot more frequently. Although felines are only of marginal importance to the Chachi with regards to subsistence, experienced hunters like Armando do have a remarkable knowledge of their behavioural specifics. Such precise ethological insights have often been obtained by empirical observations, for in some households young felines that were captured are tamed and kept as pets. Whereas eating such pets is inconceivable, there exists no restriction whatsoever on consuming specimens that are shot in the forest. The roasted meat of all kinds of felines is considered a delicacy.

Big cats such as the jaguar are not the quintessential predators they are often held to be. No doubt, they are rightly reputed for their hunting prowess, but that they occasionally end up as prey shows that they are not inherently predators. Again, we are in a situation where we are not dealing with fixed categories but with positional qualities: Predator and Prey must be understood as shapes. 'Predator' denotes the specific effort of hunting and eating flesh, whereas 'Prey' is its contrary, being hunted and being eaten. The status of Predator is never a given but rather a never-ending struggle;

it requires perpetual maintenance. During the hunt, it is never certain who will get the upper hand. In our example, if Armando had failed to react quickly and missed the jaguar, he might have ended up as Prey. If it is correct that Armando and Jaguar, Chachi and Feline, must be envisaged as shapes this implies that they are incommensurable; they share no common ground whatsoever. If Armando is Alive, the Jaguar must be Dead. That is, Jaguars should not be conceived of as wildlife or as 'other living beings', as those who are under the sway of the Western cosmology propagate. Rather, they must be understood as Beasts.

At least, that is the case for Jaguars that dwell in the forest. When they are adopted as pets, however, this no longer appears to be true. Still, even when they are captured alive (as adherents of the Western cosmology misleadingly put it) Jaguars are nevertheless Dead. But when they are nurtured and tamed their shape changes. Beasts transform into Pets; they are literally *made* Alive. In that specific context, Humans and Felines, Masters and Pets, are perhaps not identical shapes, but they are at least congruent in so far that both are Alive. Within animism, Life—not unlike Humanity—is envisaged as something that must be fabricated, for instance by constant feeding. The idea admittedly needs further elaboration but for now I would like to conclude with another tentative proposition, namely that animists systematically refuse to eat anything that is Alive. If this is true, it would explain why tamed felines are never consumed.

One last remark: shortly before he shot the jaguar, Armando had a presentiment. He had dreamt of a naked person, which is considered a good omen. That he did not speak of a skinned feline but of an unclothed human being is significant, for it suggests that he temporarily adopted the position of the Jaguars, who are said to perceive themselves as Chachi. Once more, we notice that the hunting endeavour is somehow linked to shifting shapes. The prominence of metamorphosis is confirmed by the abundance of accounts such as this one:

In the old village of *Tutsá* a Chachi woman married a man who always put on a particularly colourful shirt when he went hunting at night. In fact, the man was a jaguar who killed many animals and ate them in the forest without cooking. He used to bring back small quantities of meat which his wife roasted in her kitchen. When the food was ready and she called him to eat, he always came up with an excuse, pretending that he was not hungry or that she did not prepare it well. At one point, she caught him when he was chewing on a raw piece of flesh, upon which she exclaimed: 'My husband, you are a jaguar!' The man instantly changed into a jaguar and disappeared into the forest. Some say its spotted fur is a remnant of that colourful shirt.

What is relevant in such a positional framework is a specific effort rather than any essential feature. It is in eating raw flesh rather than cooked

meat that one reveals oneself as a Jaguar, not in any outward characteristic. Depending on the perspective, one is either Chachi or Jaguar, either Human or Beast.

Hunting as Shape-Shifting

In the Western cosmology, the likes of toucans, peccaries, monkeys, and felines can only be understood as ‘other living beings’. With the help of Armando Añapa, we have seen that animism is based on a different axiom: such inhabitants of the forest may be animate but they are not Alive—they are Beasts. Hunter and Beast, Human and Peccary, Chachi and Monkey should be grasped as equivalent but incommensurable shapes. Equivalent, because there is no qualitative difference—they are equally animate, tangible, visible. Incommensurable, because they have *nothing* in common nevertheless; if one is Human, the other is not; if one is Alive, the other is Dead. Hunting is a specific effort that constantly needs to be maintained; one must *keep in shape*, for the positions of Predator and Prey are never given in advance. Within animism nothing is ever guaranteed—everything must be earned. However, in order to keep in shape in the long term it may be necessary to change it, albeit only for a short moment. The material presented so far suggests that Chachi hunting can be grasped in terms of metamorphosis: what takes place is primarily a struggle over shapes. A technique that appears to be very prevalent is that the Predator briefly adopts the position of his Prey; the Hunter temporarily transforms into a Beast.

The shape-shifting is already apparent in premonitory dreams before the actual hunting expedition, of which we have seen a few examples: Armando perceived his future quarry as people, which suggests he had become one of them. It becomes even more evident when we consider the Chachi’s practice of ‘imitating’ their prey. Howling like a howler monkey or crying like a toucan is explicitly described as an act of courtship. Surely, it is no coincidence that in plenty of accounts changing shape is conceived of as a ‘seduction’ (think of the story of the hunter who fell in love with female peccaries and the one about the woman who marries a spider monkey). Strictly speaking, hunters do not imitate their prey—they metamorphose. This nuance is crucial. Imitation implies a qualitative difference between predator and prey, human and animal: the hunter merely does ‘as if’ and it is tacitly assumed he always remains human. Metamorphosis, by contrast, is something that takes place between distinct but perfectly equivalent shapes whose outward appearance is ultimately irrelevant: Predators and Prey, Humans and Beasts. It is a matter of either/or. The shape-shifter never does ‘as if’; he is no longer Human but Beast. The latter position is neither less real nor more symbolic than the former. There is no difference in kind between Human shape and, say, Peccary shape or Monkey shape. In short, to be a successful hunter, one must be an expert shape-shifter. But is that also the case in animism more widely? It is now time to broaden our scope.

AN ANIMISTIC BESTIARY

Amazonia—More Peccaries

I begin in western Amazonia, where Wari' hunters refer to their prey as *karawa*.³ Inimical Indians and Whites are sometimes designated by that term too, especially in the context of raiding. Reversely, game is sometimes referred to as 'enemy' (*wijam*), at least when it is apprehended from a Wari' perspective. However, Aparecida Vilaça insightfully points out that we should also pay attention to how things look from the other side. All kinds of mammals, birds, snakes, and even bees are said to perceive themselves as people and, more specifically, as hunters armed with bows and arrows. The Wari' appear to them not as humans but as game or enemies. From their viewpoint, the positions are switched: prey becomes predator and vice versa. This clearly confirms what we have suggested earlier, namely that Prey and Predator must be understood as positional qualities or shapes rather than as inherent characteristics or fixed categories. The outcome of the hunt is therefore always uncertain; who ends up as the Hunter and who as the Hunted is never determined in advance.

Vilaça shows that when the predation is successful, the victim transforms into a member of the aggressor species. The latter, in turn, perceives this as an augmentation of their human population. Metamorphosis or, as it is expressed in the vernacular, *jamu* is obviously crucial here.⁴ When the term is used with regards to a peccary or any other forest creature one is pursuing, this means it has begun to act as a predator. She summarizes all this as follows:

The preferred prey of the Wari' are animals imbued with *jamu* [i.e., the capacity to metamorphose] which are therefore also human or, more precisely, can also occupy the position of predator. As such they seek to shoot the Wari' as enemies at war or as game during the hunt. In fact, they are *wari'*, human beings, at that moment whereas the Wari' are their prey, *karawa*. These kind of role reversals also took place during warfare against Indians and Whites. They are crucial to grasp the idea of humanity as a position, related to the act of predation.⁵

In my phraseology, the prey of the Wari' must not be understood as wildlife but rather as Beasts. However, by engaging in what is in this case a specifically Human effort, the act of predation, they can assume the position of Wari'. Being hunted is a contrary effort; it implies losing one's Humanity—Predators become Prey, Wari' transform into Beasts. As I have argued before, Humanity cannot be taken for granted; it has to be maintained continuously. Complacency (in this case failing to hunt) is fatal. Whoever takes the position of Human or Predator, one thing is sure: they are by definition Alive. Because we are dealing with incommensurable shapes, Beasts/Prey are necessarily Dead.

As such, it would seem rather difficult to ‘kill’ them and therefore one should expect that the Wari’ formulate what happens during the hunt in an alternative way. That is precisely what happens—Vilaça documents that they conceive of hunting as ‘the invitation of guests’.⁶ And she explicitly mentions the link between prey and the dead. When peccaries and other game are scarce, she notes, it is sometimes suggested that they are hiding in the river, in the underwater realm of the dead. The only way to lure them back is by organizing a feast at which great quantities of maize beer are offered. The peccaries would then come and drink until they drop. Tellingly, this act is equated to predation. To drink beer is to become prey; the latter are not so much ‘killed’ as get ‘inebriated’, an idea I will examine in greater depth in the final chapter.

Jaguars, Tapirs

Before the introduction of shotguns, the Matis of western Amazonia relied on two complementary weapons: blowguns and bows. The former were used to hunt canopy species, the latter to shoot terrestrial game (and for purposes of warfare). Philippe Erikson perceptively notes that the status of the hunter is affected by his choice of arms, which operates ‘much as phone booths do for Clark Kent/Superman’.⁷ He writes:

[Only when using blowguns] Matis hunters explicitly identify themselves with jaguars, the mightiest of all predators. A Matis hunting with a blowgun (a solitary affair) thinks of himself as imitating a jaguar (also a solo hunter), and behaves in a way that would be strictly forbidden to an archer (who usually hunts in group). For example, to look like a jaguar, he may paint his body (as well as his wife’s) with *genipa* (*Genipa Americana*), covering the skin with dots, in imitation of the jaguar’s coat.⁸

Felines stand for stealth rather than bloodshed, an explicit contrast to what happens during bow hunting. Whereas ‘blowing’ a monkey or a bird tends to be envisaged as an act of seduction, killing with arrows is much more violent. Indeed, the technique is considered indistinguishable from warfare. Peccaries and tapirs are enemies: their bodies are not pierced and they walk around unadorned. As such, they are quintessentially non-Matis or, as I would put it, non-Human. Men who hunt with a bow should take all their ornaments off (just like men on the war-path). This is very significant because, as we have underlined before, Matis people normally always wear their ornaments, even when asleep.⁹ In this manner, the bow hunter becomes identical to his prey. In sum, both hunting techniques are based on a similar pattern:

You dress to kill, but do so in a way that appears as similar as possible to your intended victim. Choosing a weapon determines not only what can be hunted, but also what status can (temporarily) be assumed.¹⁰

Obviously, this suggests that hunting must be understood as metamorphosis. What we have, I contend, is a situation where Humans turn into Beasts, where Matis transform into Jaguars or Tapirs. We are dealing with incommensurable shapes and we should therefore avoid the mistake of viewing the latter as 'other living beings'. Jaguars and Tapirs are not Alive but Dead; they are not wildlife but Beasts. If this is correct, it implies that hunters temporarily die. Plenty of ethnographic material supports this interpretation.

The use of curare is particularly revealing. Hunters usually travelled far downriver to obtain the lianas from which they extract this poison for their darts; people would normally never go in that direction, because it was assumed that the dead dwell there.¹¹ Unlike ordinary food that is cooked using firewood collected around the house, curare must be cooked with wood from the deep forest.¹² This compulsory use of 'non-humanized' combustible (the expression is Erikson's) leads Erikson to the insight that what is going on is a veritable 'anti-cooking'. In my wording, it amounts to a contrary effort; those who prepare curare are not Human, not even Alive. As I understand it, those who travel downstream and use the poison are literally Dead. The intricate link between blowpipes, peach palms, and Whipping Corpses further supports the claim that those who hunt are perhaps animate, but also Dead. Matis blowpipes and peach palms are strikingly similar, their forms and proportions are quasi indistinguishable. Such palms, in turn, are envisaged as consubstantial with the Whipping Corpses, which are among the principal manifestations of death and are said to reside in ancient peach palm orchards. In addition, blowpipes are often referred to as the arms of the deceased. In short, by using his blowgun the hunter assumes the same position as the Dead; as long as he engages in this contrary effort, he is no longer Human but a Whipping Corpse.

North America—Deer, Beasts that Sweat

The Navajo are widely known as devoted sheepherders. Time and again, ethnographers emphasize the close identification of the people and their sheep. Both are continuously reanimated and reborn through so-called blessing way or beauty way ceremonies. If a shepherd wants to increase the number of sheep he owns, John R. Farella explains, he does *hózhóójí* ('blessing way') and 'thus creates the sheep ritually just as they were created in an earlier time'.¹³ In fact, not just the prototypical sheep but all Navajo valuables—fabrics, cultivated plants, horses—continuously have to be reproduced through such processes of 'giving birth'. For my purposes here, however, I wish to focus on the inverse process, namely that of continuous death (as Farella has called it). Hunting, in particular, is one notable activity through which the Navajo deliberately insert themselves in that 'ugly' process.

To begin, it is worth noting that different kinds of prey are associated with different kinds of jewellery. For instance, deer are white-bead game, antelopes turquoise game, and mountain sheep abalone-shell game. Before

and during the hunt Navajo hunters behave in a manner that conspicuously deviates from their ordinary demeanour.¹⁴ While normally scrupulously avoided because they are deemed omens of disaster, topics pertaining to blood and death are freely discussed. In those particular circumstances, they signify good fortune. Hunters who are about to set out may also throw pollen in the fire. That is one of the worst offences thinkable, because pollen is one of their most valued food items. Formerly, sweat lodges were always used prior to the hunt. I quote Karl W. Luckert:

[T]he hunters, by observing the ceremonial requirements of sweating, did themselves undergo a change—they actually come to possess many of the attributes of the animal in whose way they hunted. . . . The hunter did everything possible to imitate the animal in whose way they were hunting. They ate from branches, slept like animals, and communicated among themselves by using animal cries.¹⁵

Whether these hunters change into ‘other living beings’ remains to be seen, but what is clear is that a metamorphosis takes place. Locally, this is expressed in terms of various ‘hunting ways’ such as the deer-way. Luckert gives a more specific description: ‘Hunters put on deer clothing and antlers to overcome other deer unnoticed—they become deer temporarily’.¹⁶ Alternatively, their wives back at home enhance the hunter’s chances by wearing doe outfits in order to attract male deer. This suggests that the business of hunting is not so much about ‘killing’ as about ‘seducing’. Alternatively, it is expressed as ‘herding’. In this case, game becomes livestock. A group of deer is seen as a flock of sheep; the hunter perceives himself as a shepherd, singing ‘I am going after it, the game shepherd I am’.¹⁷ Once more, we notice that animists do not readily agree with what adherents of the modern cosmology deem so obvious, namely that hunting is primarily about ‘killing’.

This is not some kind of repressive psychological mechanism or some way of coming to terms with some deep feeling of guilt. The real reason why those Navajo hunters seem to avoid the verb ‘to kill’ is rather more profane: the deer and other prey they pursue are not so much ‘animals’ or ‘wildlife’ as Beasts. They may be animate but they are also Dead, which implies that it would be rather absurd to ‘kill’ them. Navajo and Deer, Humans and Beasts, are incommensurable shapes. If one is Alive, the other must be Dead—hence the association between prey and jewellery (artefacts that are associated with death). When the prospective hunter changes from Navajo into Deer, from Human into Beast, he temporarily dies. More exactly, he is no longer Alive but Dead. It is no coincidence, then, that he speaks so avidly about topics such as blood and decay. Destroying pollen is yet another example of such a contrary effort, which affirms his non-Human shape. Finally, one will not be surprised to hear that taking a sweat bath is sometimes referred to as a temporary death.

Buffalos, Wolves, Eagles

For many years ethnographers have been puzzled by the Lakota practice of designating buffalos, elk, wolves, grizzly bears, and much else as *wakan*.¹⁸ It is true, many other things were and still are considered *wakan* as well: rocks, pipes, sagebrush, sweat lodges, ghosts, the deceased, etc. Still, it is primarily the Lakota's specific way of engaging with 'wildlife' that has led anthropologists to all kinds of speculations about their supposed nature worship, besides engendering endless and inconclusive discussions about the exact meaning and the best translation of *wakan*. The aim here is not to revisit these worn-out debates. Instead, we will examine a few revealing instances of Lakota animism. I begin with what is perhaps the most iconic practice: the communal buffalo hunt, which was a central aspect of Lakota life in the first half of the 19th century. At that time, they already possessed horses and guns, which enhanced the yield of such undertakings considerably (and also contributed to the general decline of the species).

Buffalo hunts were always preceded by a whole variety of rites that were considered *wakan*. In preparation for their endeavour, hunters would withdraw. By fasting, smoking their pipe, and wrapping themselves in hides with the fur side out they sought visions, especially of grey wolves whose fleetness and endurance they hoped to emulate. Bornali Halder summarizes the rationale as follows: 'Wolves are wanderers and therefore have knowledge of everything. As such hunters have often prayed to wolves when they wanted to locate game. Wolves give advice. They teach songs in dreams and visions and teach humans how to howl as a wolf.'¹⁹ In the camp, shamans also made a contribution to secure the game: '[A medicine man] would paint a buffalo skull with red and blue stripes and lay beside it a filled pipe on a bed of fresh sage. It was believed that the skull would turn into a real buffalo that would call its brethren. A special song was sung in the dark and a buffalo chip would be burned.'²⁰ Similar rites were performed before killing eagles or, basically, any kind of hunt: the element that always comes back is that the hunter fills a pipe with tobacco and smokes it in a formal manner, thus making himself *wakan*. Halder notes: 'Even today, whenever an eagle is seen, tobacco must be offered to it, even if this means throwing a couple of cigarettes out of the window of a moving car.'²¹

Here is a suggestion: making oneself *wakan*—howling as a wolf, singing a buffalo song, offering tobacco—must be understood as a contrary effort. After smoking his pipe, the buffalo hunter is no longer Lakota but Wolf; likewise, the supporting shaman is no longer Lakota but Buffalo. Those who are *wakan* are no longer Human but Beast; they have changed shape. Hunting entails metamorphosis. Those who are *wakan* are not less tangible or more ephemeral than those who are *lakota*; they are equivalent. But at the same time, these respective shapes have no common ground whatsoever; they are incommensurable. If one is Alive, the other is necessarily Dead. That is why Buffalos and Wolves should not be envisaged as wildlife or even

animals but as Beasts; they may be animate but they are also Dead. The very notion of 'other living beings' is inconceivable in Lakota animism.

The Northern Pacific Rim—Whales

Yup'ik animists appear to take a mischievous delight in baffling ethnographers with statements such as 'beluga whales are people'.²² In order to qualify this kind of assertion, so common in all forms of animism, I briefly focus on traditional whaling in the Bering Sea. Among the Eskimo peoples of North Alaska, preparations for the whale hunt begin in early March. Grey whales winter in lagoons off Baja California and Mexico and travel north along the Pacific coast in the spring.²³ Such sea mammals are slow swimmers and relatively docile, which makes it possible to approach them by paddling or sailing. At the centre of the preparations are the figures of the *umialik*, the whale boat captain, and his wife. It used to be a time marked by a particular solemnity, with the whaling captains 'assuming almost priestly roles'.²⁴ Prior to the hunt, special whaling songs were performed and all those involved donned new clothes, discarding their old outfits. Consider the following description:

As the time for the appearance of the whales neared, [whaling boats and] whaling gear, including ritual equipment, were moved out to the ice leads by dogsled, and hunting camps were established. Here the hunters remained, sometimes for days or even weeks, their gear maintained in ready condition, always poised for an instantaneous launch should the lookout report signs of an approaching whale. The slightest sound or deviation from prescribed ritual was thought sufficient to spoil the hunt. Meanwhile, the women and children, who were forbidden to be present on the ice, had to obey strict rules of behavior, remaining silent and not engaging in otherwise routine activities, such as sewing. The *umialik*'s wife was especially important in her role representing the whale during the hunt; she had to remain docile to insure the whale's similar behavior, and her dignified silence induced the whale to come willingly to the hunters.²⁵

When a whale was sighted, the whaling crew, composed of seven to ten men, ran the boat into the water, made their approach and harpooned it. When they left the shore and just before throwing the harpoon they would sing the captain's personal whaling incantations. During the hunt, the captain's wife had to remain very quiet and was forbidden to make brusque movements. This is not just a custom from the distant past. In 1988, one ethnographer came across the wife of a successful whaling captain in a launderette.²⁶ To her surprise, she noticed that the woman sorted the clothes for the washing very slowly and very carefully: the reason was that her husband was out at sea at that very moment. After a successful hunt,

the cadaver of the whale was towed to the ice edge where the captain's wife, dressed in finery, greeted it ceremonially with songs, and gave it a drink of fresh water. The whale was received as an honoured guest.

In Yup'ik animism, whaling was not so much about slaughter as about hospitality and seduction. The point was not to kill an animal but rather to receive a guest; to entice somebody to visit you. Ann Fienup-Riordan writes: 'Men and women worked together to draw animals into human space and to care for their guests after they arrived.'²⁷ This apparent euphemising is not a coincidence, for Whales are not so much 'animals' as Beasts. That is, they are Dead. Consequently, 'killing' them makes no sense. What happens during the hunt is a metamorphosis whereby Humans temporarily turn into Whales. The captain's wife does not represent a whale, but assumes a different shape: when her husband is out at sea she is no longer Human but Whale. In other words, she is no longer Alive but Dead—we are dealing with incommensurable shapes. Many elements indicate that the crew members and the captain himself also adopted the position of Whales. That they stayed on the ice in the days before the hunt, away from the village, marks their non-Human shape. That would clarify why, as one ethnographer notes, 'the whalers were reckoned unclean, and nobody would eat out of the same dish with them, or even come near them'.²⁸ The whalers' changing of clothes during the preparatory phase is not gratuitous, and neither is the fact that some captains wore headgear representing the 'saddle' of the whale.²⁹ Just like the wealth of whale-related paraphernalia in their boats, such garments and accessories indicate a metamorphosis. Whereas proponents of the Western cosmology clamour 'people kill whales', animists retort that 'Whales seduce Whales' or 'Hosts receive Guests' (the apprehension depends on the perspective).

Bears, Swordfish, Sake-Drinking Beasts

In northern Japan, the Ainu were renowned as expert hunters. Shooting bears with bows and arrows was seen as one of the most prestigious enterprises. They were also excellent sea hunters, skilled in harpooning swordfish and much else. Although they obviously took great pride in all this, Ainu hunters nevertheless remained extremely reticent about one thing: the 'killing' of their prey. In fact, it would appear that they systematically refused to admit that they kill anything at all. In their view, hunting amounted to receiving a distinguished guest and prey was deemed to make itself willingly available to worthy hunters.³⁰ Bears, swordfish, and all other inhabitants of mountains and oceans are indeed referred to as *kamuy*, Visitors. As such, they were treated with the utmost respect and offered food and saké. They were also given presents such as willow sticks with curled shavings. In gratitude for the hospitality, the Visitors would bring fish, meat, hides, and so forth. In other words, the spoils of the hunt were envisaged as return-gifts. Strictly speaking, the act of hunting is an exercise of exchange.³¹ This

was not a matter of euphemising a supposedly cruel enterprise; rather, the Ainu did not 'kill' because the entities they pursued were already Dead. Bears, swordfish, and all the rest were neither 'wildlife' nor 'other living beings'. They were Beasts.

We are not talking about fixed biological categories but about positional shapes. In fact, Ainu hunting must be grasped as a change of shapes—a metamorphosis. Consider the example of bears. In winter, when the bears withdrew into their dens to hibernate, Ainu archers flushed them out and shot them with poisoned arrows.³² The corpse was carried back, brought into the house through the eastern window, and was welcomed as a distinguished guest—the Mountain Visitor. People would gather around the hearth and honour their guest with songs and dance. After they had consumed the flesh, the skull of the bear was placed on a willow stick on the eastern side of the house. Finally, the Visitor was sent off with plenty of souvenirs: saké, millet beer and curled shavings. Sea mammals received similar treatment. The orca was regarded as the foremost Ocean Visitor; it was the bear's counterpart at sea. At festive occasions people often performed a stranded-whale dance, expressing their wish for a whale (whose meat they loved) to strand on the beach. That this wish was sometimes realized was often due to orcas who drove all kinds of marine mammals to the shore. An elderly man recounted such an experience as follows:

On June 8, 1949, two orcas chased a whale ashore at Shiraoi. While it was struggling, waves washed it higher on the beach. Farther out in the ocean the killer whales were squeaking and jumping, appearing to be angry about the Ainu stealing their prey. The whale was [about five meters] long and was a baby. Elderly people who were present at that time conducted a simple ritual to send off the spirit of the stranded whale after flensing it. The prayer given at the ritual was as follows: 'We deeply thank you for coming down to visit our village. You might be feeling lonely for being away from your parents. You came down for us [. . .] and brought us your presents of meat and blubber. We appreciate it very much.'³³

Whereas the ethnographers' translation is debatable, the key idea is clear: the whale is envisaged as a respected guest and is therefore honoured with all kinds of gifts such as saké and shaved willow sticks. The whale reciprocates by giving its meat and blubber. In both cases, we have a shift in perspective whereby Predator transforms into Host and Prey into Visitor. If Predator and Prey are Dead, Host and Visitor are Alive. Again, we are confronted with equivalent but incommensurable shapes. Whereas giving and receiving presents are specifically Ainu efforts, hunting and being hunted are contrary efforts. The former is the affair of Humans, the latter that of Beasts. Each entity can assume two positions: Bear and Ainu, Whale and Ainu, Beast and Human, Dead and Alive. When the positions are switched, metamorphosis occurs.

Southern Asia—Bees and Beasts that Should Not Be Ridiculed

Batek and Chewong forest dwellers have a reputation for their skilled use of blowpipes, but I shall not concentrate on hunting techniques for my purposes here. Instead, I will discuss their relation with bees. Honey and seasonal fruits are the most valued foods in Batek animism.³⁴ Neither of these items is always available in the forest, something the Batek explain by saying that when they are not on earth, they are in the heavens. It is said that bees and blossoms take on human form when they are in the sky. During thunderstorms, which occur after the yearly floods, they are supposed to be dropped on fruit-trees. Kirk Endicott writes:

The first bees were *hala'* who lived by eating flowers. Even today, the bees are actually *hala'* who take human form when they are absent from the earth. They normally live on top of the firmament. After the floods each year, they fly to earth in the form of bees. The fruit blossoms follow the bees to earth. The bees build their nests hanging from the branches of tall trees. They live off the dew they suck out of the flowers, and honey is their urine. When the flowers disappear, they return to the sky and resume their human-like form.³⁵

In my view, the vernacular term *hala'* denotes the idea that each being possesses at least two different shapes; in this case Bee and Human, or Fruit and Human. Just as certain kinds of fruit are honoured with fruit songs, the first honey is greeted by the burning of incense and the singing of bee songs. Such songs are also sung if somebody wants to 'attack' a bees' nest. My suggestion is that these musical interventions indicate a shift in shape: the Human honey collector temporarily turns into a Bee, thus adopting the same point of view as the insects he is after. It is the same principle as that which always recurs in hunting: in order to outwit one's prey, one temporarily has to assume a similar perspective. Strictly speaking, Bees are neither 'animals' nor even 'other living beings', for both terms imply a common denominator (the condition of being alive). If Humans are Alive, Bees are necessarily Dead, for we are dealing with incommensurable shapes. Bees may be animate, but they are not Alive: they are Beasts.

One of the most remarkable properties of shapes is their positional quality. Beasts perceive themselves as Humans; in other words, who is Alive depends on the perspective. With regards to Beasts, Signe Howell specifies that while 'wearing their human cloak', they behave just like the Chewong themselves, 'that is they work, and enter the kinship system and systems of reciprocity and exchange of humans'.³⁶ It is an example of what she refers to as 'the principle of differential perception'.³⁷ But the idea can be pushed further. In fact, it elucidates one of those great puzzles of Southeast-Asian

ethnography: the taboo on 'laughing with animals', which not only recurs in the Malay peninsula but throughout the Austronesian world, albeit in different forms.³⁸ In Chewong animism, those who mock or tease non-human inhabitants of the forest will perish in thunderstorms or floods: they are punished by the Master of Lightning or the Rainbow Dragon. For example, people who make fun of a monkey by dressing it up in human clothing or place a captured squirrel in a baby sling, rocking it to and fro for their amusement, will be struck by disaster.³⁹ Pondering about this remarkable taboo, Howell speculates that 'It is possible that the underlying reason for the prohibition is that one should not submit other species to activities which mimic human behaviour.'⁴⁰ Her observation supports the idea that what is really at stake is one's position as a Human being: those who laugh shift shape; they begin to perceive Beasts as Humans. In Chewong animism all Beasts are, in a way, lesser Masters of Lightning or lesser Rainbow Dragons. 'Breaking the taboo' is tantamount to turning into one of these non-Humans. Catastrophes are actually metamorphoses, a point that will be elaborated in the final chapter

Turtles and Pigs

I now turn to the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal to concentrate on Ongee hunting practices. At sea, the Ongees use harpoons to kill turtles and dugongs. In the forest, they use bows and arrows to hunt an endemic species of bush pig. But Vishvajit Pandya insists that the role of weapons should not be overestimated, as hunting happens first and foremost by smell. Basically, the one who hunts absorbs the smell of the one hunted; to release smell is to be hunted. Limiting the smell emitted by one's body is therefore crucial: that is why hunters always apply clay paint, wear bone ornaments and carry fire wherever they go.⁴¹ In the jungle they tend to walk in a single file and the person who goes in front never fails to carry a couple of burning wood-pieces, leaving behind a rising trail of smoke. The precursor also has a special bag with red clay paint and lower jawbone ornament. Everybody is careful to follow his track and thus walks under a screen of smoke which is assumed to restrict the dispersal of their smell.⁴² The pursuit of prey by an Ongee is *talabuka*, which denotes a deliberate conjunction of paths of movement between the hunter and the hunted. The process by which a predator tracks down the smell of Ongees is referred to as *malabuka*, an involuntary coincidence.⁴³ The overarching idea is that smell has to be manipulated. Or, as Pandya puts it: 'The game of hide and seek, involving the trick of releasing and restricting smell, is the basic activity of hunting'.⁴⁴ The outcome of this game is always in suspense: who hunts and who gets hunted depends on whose smell is lost and whose smell is retained.

Crucially, turtles and pigs are not 'wildlife' but Beasts. They may be animate, but they are not Alive. Ongee and Turtle, Ongee and Pig, Human and Beast, are equivalent but incommensurable shapes. If the former are

Alive, the latter must be Dead. There is no common ground whatsoever, for the hunter and the hunted are not *just a little bit* different but *radically* so. In Ongee animism, it is impossible to conceive of prey animals as ‘other living beings’. Because Turtles and Pigs are already Dead there is no point in killing them. That is why Ongee hunters always go on about the absorption of smell; this is not some clever way of euphemising the purportedly cruel act of slaughter. In my terms, keeping one’s smell is the specific effort necessary to remain Human. Applying clay paint, wearing bone ornaments and carrying fire secures one’s position as an Ongee hunter. Releasing smell is a contrary effort; those who do this lose their Humanity and turn into Beasts, they are no longer Alive but Dead. The hunters’ concern with making their prey ‘light’ by cutting and eviscerating its body (similar to what happened when Ongees dealt with inimical outsiders during the colonial period) must also be seen in this view: to become light is a sure sign that the one captured no longer pertains to the Living.⁴⁵

If this argument is correct, one should expect themes of metamorphosis to be quite prominent. That is indeed the case. A recurrent story is that of how the ancestors remained human only because they kept their fire alight, whereas those who lost their fire were turned into birds, fishes, etc. In another account, the canoe of ancestral sea hunters capsizes, upon which they transform into turtles.⁴⁶ All this indicates that Ongee hunting is primarily a matter of shape-shifting. Absorbing smell equals controlling the metamorphosis. Once again, we see that Human and Beast, Predator and Prey, are positional rather than inherent qualities.

Africa—Antelopes, Giraffes, and other Hoofed Beasts

In Uduk animism there is a fundamental distinction between animals that live in or near the home hamlet, and the wild or ‘hoofed’ creatures outside. Wendy James demonstrates that everything that is domesticated has its hoofed counterpart.⁴⁷ Camels are opposed to giraffes, cattle to antelopes, goats to gazelles, chickens to starlings, etc. Expert hunters are known as masters of the horn; they are the ones who give everyone instructions during communal hunts in the savannah. The basic technique is forming a wide circle that closes in; the masters of the horn would then spear antelopes and other hoofed creatures. It is said that such masters, and sometimes also their close relatives, have the ability to see where their prey are grazing for they are hoofed themselves. In fact, they are thought to herd them by night, as other people herd goats and cows by day.⁴⁸ A senior hunter explains this as follows: ‘If a man has the horn and he goes to stalk, [. . .] he won’t go seeking the animals’ tracks. The animals know their master. The man goes into the forest there, and the animals come to him. They come out, and follow him to his village. He knows from a dream at night, from going to stalk there’.⁴⁹ James provides a detailed account of this remarkable kind of herding:

[One evening, Tenge, a young woman closely related to a senior hunter], was making strange animal noises. I went along and found her apparently unconscious, being held by several people and patted on the abdomen. She was twisting around and kicking her feet but not really violent. Her eyes were closed, her cheeks tear-stained, her mouth falling open, and her limbs flabby. She was making clicking noises with her teeth and in her throat, and a sort of lapping sound; and there was intermittent speech—I heard several references to [cattle]. [People] explained to me later that Tenge had had a dream as a girl, of being attacked by wild animals. What I had seen was quite common with her—she was ‘herding the animals by night’; when she said ‘cattle’, she was referring to the antelopes. She was making the clicking noises that people normally make when they want to calm the cows for milking; but Tenge was wanting to drink milk from the antelopes. The lapping sound was the sound of drinking; but the animals were kicking her too, and the cries of ‘Ish!’ ‘Ish!’ were those that people make to drive away or fend off domestic animals in the hamlet. Tenge herself laughed the next day and said she was struck by the cattle; but everyone agreed she was really struck by wild animals.⁵⁰

What occurs is a shift of perspective, whereby antelopes are viewed as cattle. Strictly speaking, antelopes are not wild animals but Beasts. Cattle and Antelopes are equivalent but incommensurable shapes. They may be equally tangible and equally animate, but if the former are Alive, the latter are necessarily Dead. The same goes for Camels and Giraffes, Goats and Gazelles, and so forth. Domesticated animals can legitimately be described as ‘other living beings’, but their hoofed counterparts most definitely cannot. The latter have absolutely *nothing* in common with the former, not even ‘being alive’. In Uduk animism there is no common ground whatsoever between Animals-of-the-Home and Beasts. It hence comes as no surprise that masters of the horn refer to the act of predation as herding cattle. After all, it would be rather farcical to kill something that is already Dead. The hunt itself involves a metamorphosis, whereby an Uduk temporarily becomes a Hoofed One. This is usually marked by a change of colour, from red to black or vice versa. If someone spears an ostrich for instance, he ‘sits black’.⁵¹ That is, he avoids people, shaves his head, puts on charcoal and sesame oil, and refrains from eating (not coincidentally, the same procedure is followed during mourning). However, porridge and other Uduk food is gradually reintroduced to him for otherwise the *arum* of the ostrich would cause him to die. Eventually, a beer party is organized during which he is anointed with red ochre. In short, a Human turns into a Beast (black) and then turns back into a Human (red). The hunter temporarily dies; as a Hoofed One, he is no longer Alive but Dead.

Lions, Beasts that Molest Cattle

Maa-speaking herders of East Africa traditionally regard hunting as beneath them. However, there are some exceptions. They did occasionally hunt lions, leopards, and rhinoceroses, especially when these had attacked their cattle. Such endeavours were the prerogative of the members of one specific age-group, namely the *morán*, the Warriors. Fighting lions, in particular, was regarded as very prestigious. Warriors were keen to obtain lion-mane headdresses and other trophies; these marked their courage and used to be worn at dance feasts. Concerning the Maasai, Paul Spencer writes:

The male lion is a highly respected enemy; [it is] 'the great predator' who lurks in the bush to maraud their cattle. A pride of hungry lions may even seek to break into a village, breaching the stockade, and stampeding the herd. When a lion is sighted, a cry goes up and the *morán* muster themselves in their battle finery [. . .] to mount a lion posse [. . .] A cornered lion is no easy victim, and claiming his mane as a trophy is an ambition of all *morán*. If the lion escapes or one of the *morán* is gored, then the posse return to their villages quietly and without celebration. At other times, they return in triumph and dance their lion dance from village to village. The hero who has won the trophy carries it, and the women dress up and flock to hang beads round his neck and tuck handfuls of grass into his body cloth. The girls later sew the mane into a ceremonial headdress, and it is displayed prominently on a tall post in the [warrior village] when it is not actually being worn.⁵²

Customarily, the trophy was won by the Warrior who first speared the lion or, alternatively, by the one who first grabbed its tail. Very similar practices prevailed among the Samburu. Until quite recently, it was expected that every Samburu *morán* would spear a lion. When they accomplished this highly honourable deed, they would sing a special song: 'Draw up your [leather vessel], draw up your [vessel] and draw water from your cattle, return home with your cattle and be honoured. . . .'⁵³ The ethnographer who recorded this song explains that vessel stands for spear, water for blood, and cattle for lion. In other words, the hunt is envisaged as a form of cattle herding, not unlike what we have just seen concerning the Uduk. After a lion had been speared, its carcass was left to the hyenas but the claws and skin were kept and made into charms and adornments. Significantly, lion hunters often 'have fits' during which they appear to suffocate, just like dancers at rituals or warriors after a cattle raid. They yelp and fall to the ground in stupor, frothing at the mouth, shivering, and eventually shaking uncontrollably.

To combat cattle predators, I suggest, is to metamorphose. The triumphant Maasai hunters who perform a lion dance and wear all sorts of trophies are not Humans but Lions, they are no longer Alive but Dead.

They have changed shape. In fact, I would argue that all *moran* or Warriors are Monsters or Beasts rather than Humans. As bush dwellers par excellence, they pertain to the realm of the Dead rather than to that of the Living—I will elaborate this preliminary thesis further onwards. That Samburu hunters do not emphasize the act of ‘killing’ lions but rather claim to ‘draw water from their cattle’ is not unexpected if we take into account that lions are not so much animals or wildlife (i.e. sharing the condition of being alive) as Beasts. As such, they are already Dead. Killing them would therefore be awkward. Lions and Samburu, Beasts and Humans, are equivalent but incommensurable shapes. Dancing with a lion-maned headdress, shivering, and shaking are contrary efforts; those who engage in it are no longer Human, no longer Alive. What takes place is a metamorphosis, the dancer assumes the position of a Lion, the ‘suffocating’ shaker temporarily dies (the link between Death and suffocation will be documented in the following chapters). During the hunt itself, a similar but slightly more complicated change of perspective occurs: Hunters shift into Herders, Lions shift into Cattle.

ANIMISM AND ITS RESTRICTED CONCEPTION OF LIFE

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that notions such as ‘wildlife’ or indeed ‘animal’, as conceived of in the Western cosmology, are singularly unsuitable to understand how so-called indigenous people relate to the animate beings they prefer to hunt. The broader notion of ‘other living beings’ is similarly misleading. The central problem is that modern scientists and adherents of the Western cosmology more generally have persistently confused the animate with life. As a result, almost everything is taken to be ‘alive’ by default: the forest and its inhabitants, birds in the sky, fish in the oceans, and so forth. The world is taken to be full of living beings and no specific effort is required to count as such—it suffices to be animate. In the Western cosmology, the condition of being alive is very generously attributed to this, that, and the other without particular conditions. From the examples we have discussed it emerges that animism is characterised by a much more restricted notion of life, what I refer to as Life. Only Humans and, in some cases, their pets and/or tamed animals are Alive. To be Alive implies a fairly well-defined, sustained maintenance—within animism, nothing comes for free.

So the animistic Life has to be earned. Simply being animate is not enough, for that does not tell you anything about whether somebody is Alive or Dead (both positions are equivalent and those who assume them are therefore equally animate). In fact, it turns out that peccaries and all the other creatures that are misleadingly referred to as wildlife are not Alive at all. Indeed, it would be more adequate to speak of ‘wild-dead’. Within animism, death is much more palpably present than those indoctrinated by the

modern Western cosmology imagine. So-called animists do not distinguish between people and animals, for this entails a minimal degree of commensurability, namely sharing the state of being alive. Rather, they distinguish between Humans and Beasts, and that is a profound difference rather than a subtle nuance. These respective shapes have absolutely nothing in common, they are wholly incommensurable. If Humans are Alive, Beasts are Dead. Peccaries and all the rest are concrete manifestations of death.

This whole argument about animism and its restricted Life elucidates the puzzle whose general character was first fully appreciated by Philippe Descola: 'In most societies where hunting plays an important role one should never allude to the ultimate fate of one's prey. Expressions that designate the hunt only rarely refer to what finally happens, namely its killing.'⁵⁴ Descola wonders why the concealment of one's predatory intentions, avoiding to utter the name of one's prey, and the use of apparent euphemisms are elements that come back time and again.⁵⁵ The present chapter confirms his hypothesis that hunting is primarily a matter of metamorphoses 'during which humans and non-humans change perspectives and enter the skin of the other in order to adopt the other's point of view.'⁵⁶ That the various elements discussed above recur so often and so consistently is indeed an effect of the hunters' temporary transformation from Human into Beast.

However, the chapter also goes a step further by departing from the deep-rooted axiom that hunters and their prey—or humans and animals—are equally alive. The premise that the former and the latter share the common condition of life is usually deemed undisputable, at least in the Western cosmology. Nevertheless, this presumed elementary affinity, on which the entire field of modern biology has been founded, is an assumption rather than a self-evident scientific fact. The various forms of animism I have discussed are premised on a different, but by no means less plausible supposition. Echoing Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's thesis on the priority of affinity over consanguinity in Amazonian kinship systems, I would suggest this assumption entails that Death is always the default position, whereas Life is much more exceptional or at least harder to achieve because it always requires a specific rather than a generic effort.⁵⁷

Whereas this chapter has mainly focussed on animal conceptions within animism, it is worth mentioning that its principal idea of a restricted Life may also be relevant with regards to plants and trees. Consider, for example, Laura Rival's investigations into Amerindian cultivation practices of the bitter and sweet varieties of manioc. Reflecting on the oddity of a poisonous crop—bitter manioc has to be detoxified before it can be eaten—she wonders whether 'it is not as a living plant growing in fields that manioc is finally domesticated, but, rather, as food prepared by the hearth, the most domestic of all places.'⁵⁸ The question is certainly astute, but I would tentatively add that it might also be useful to look at the possibility that bitter manioc is not included within the restricted sphere of Life, at least initially—this would mean that the gardens where it is cultivated are conceived

of as places of Death, an interpretation for which there are various ethnographic clues (think of the vampire-like garden spirits described by Achuar cultivators). The hypothesis is admittedly speculative, but if correct this would imply that the grating, the squeezing, and the whole extensive treatment of bitter manioc is, in fact, a way of *making it Alive*. Just like prey animals, plants that are eaten cannot be 'killed' because they were already Dead to begin with.

Part II

Life as Discontinuity

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4 Adversity

An Investigation into Metamorphosis

Un trait classique de bien des ontologies animiques est en effet la capacité de métamorphose.

—Philippe Descola (2005: 191)

[. . .] a widespread belief, extending through savage, barbaric, classic, oriental, and mediaeval life, and surviving to this day in European superstition. This belief, which may be conveniently called the Doctrine of Werewolves, is that certain men, by natural gift or magic art, can turn for a time into ravening wild beasts. The origin of this idea is by no means sufficiently explained.

—Edward B. Tylor (2010a[1871]: 279)

In the modern Western cosmology, all living beings are the outcome of processes of evolution that stretch over millions of years. Life is always conceived of as continuous in such a framework. The remaining chapters illustrate that what distinguishes animism is the axiom of discontinuity. That is why metamorphosis is so conspicuous in animistic rituals and myths. In this chapter I investigate metamorphosis through the angle of adversity.

EVOLUTION AND METAMORPHOSIS

Only professional biologists and natural scientists are properly accredited to deal with the question of life in contemporary Western societies. As a result, the question has become framed in a very specific way. One key element is that life is always conceived of as continuous; it is transmitted from organism to organism in uninterrupted sequences across vast stretches of time. In the process, life evolves. For example, it has recently been established that all extant birds evolved from feathered theropod dinosaurs that lived during the Jurassic period. This theory of evolution is one of the cornerstones of the modern sciences. A central axiom is that nature does not take leaps—*natura non facit saltum*; sudden great modifications are considered impossible. So-called indigenous people evidently tend to disagree with that assumption of a fundamental continuity. In their myths, metamorphosis is all but ubiquitous. In their magic, shamans change shape into birds, snakes, and much else. In their rituals, transformations into all sorts of monsters and beasts take place time and again. Yet this does not constitute a major problem for proponents of the Western cosmology. The animistic alternative of discontinuity is easily brushed aside if one accepts the modern bifurcated model.

The bifurcation can be expressed in different but essentially isomorphic ways as one between culture and nature, the social and the physical, myth and history, magic and science, animism and biology, or—especially relevant for my purposes here—metamorphosis and evolution. Only the latter components of these respective dichotomies are taken to refer to what is staged as truth, reality, facts. The former are deemed to be imperfect representations, more or less fanciful approximations, artefacts. Although they tend to be treated with a certain amount of benevolence these days, animists are never taken quite as seriously as scientists. The attitude of those who have adopted this bifurcated arrangement is ultimately one of condescension. My aim here is to challenge this deep-seated paternalism. In the second part of the book I intend to demonstrate something that regular biologists may find inconceivable, not to say scandalous, namely that metamorphosis is on a par with evolution. This will be done through the angles of adversity (this chapter), death (chapter five), and catastrophe (chapter six). What will transpire is that thinking of life as continuous is a choice rather than a necessity, as modern scientists and other missionaries of the Western cosmology want to make us believe.

REVIVING THE SEARCH FOR A ‘GENERAL THEORY OF MAGIC’

Metamorphosis used to be ubiquitous but it is as if—since the period known as the Enlightenment—there has been a concerted effort to banish it to the realm of myth or to degrade it to something metaphorical or symbolical. Nevertheless, it remains a central yet ill-understood feature of any form of animism. In the previous chapters it has already been shown that metamorphosis is remarkably prevalent: Humans transform into Monsters, Humans become Beasts, and vice versa. Now the time has come to investigate this matter in more depth. Themes of adversity are particularly apposite in that respect, as they often involve all kinds of ritual experts. In the academic literature, these are designated by a confusing variety of names such as shaman, magician, diviner, medicine-man, sorcerer, wizard, and so forth. Whatever the merit of labelling such experts in one way or another, they appear to have one thing in common: perhaps more than anyone else, they possess a special capacity for metamorphosis. In this respect, it is useful to consider a quote from two authors who have perhaps fallen out of fashion these days, Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss. In their 1904 work *Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie* (Outline of a General Theory of Magic) they wrote:

Pourtant, l'unité de tout le système magique nous apparaît maintenant avec plus d'évidence; [. . .] Nous avons des raisons d'affirmer que la magie forme bien un tout réel. Les magiciens ont des caractéristiques communes; les effets produits par les opérations magiques ont toujours malgré leur infinie diversité, quelque chose de commun.¹

In all its simplicity, the claim is extraordinary: Hubert and Mauss propose that magic—a term they use in an inclusive fashion, subsuming shamanism, divination, etc.—constitutes a unity. Notwithstanding the mind-boggling diversity of their practices, all magicians have something in common. At the beginning of the 20th century, one could still say such things without being excommunicated from the anthropological establishment. At present, however, many social anthropologists would hesitate to take such sweeping statements seriously. Nowadays it is often taken for granted that saying something about magic in general must necessarily be overly simplistic. Comprehensive approaches are discarded because they are allegedly insensitive to specific cultural contexts and historical contingencies. The field of enquiry has become carved up: shamanism in Siberia and the Americas, witchcraft and divination in Africa, and so forth. This regional take on what Hubert and Mauss grandly referred to as ‘magic’ has become all but prescriptive. But authors of the early 20th century were less stifled by sub-disciplinary conventions than contemporary ones are. The present chapter will show that taking their (allegedly) over-ambitious and somewhat naïve scheme of comparison fully into account ultimately proves to be refreshing.

Magic and the specific role of metamorphosis will be investigated by means of a survey of adversity, broadly conceived of as situations where things are not going as smoothly as they are supposed to. We know that people often call upon some kind of expert—a shaman, a medicine man—in precisely this sort of circumstances. Let us begin with a concrete example, drawn from my own research among the Chachi. The reader will remember that besides crafting canoes and hunting, marriage is one of the cornerstones of what Chachi people refer to as ‘living well’ (*ura’chunu*). I have already shown that monogamy is considered very important. So important, in fact, that when it leaks out that a spouse wants to run away or that somebody is having an illicit affair, a Policeman is called upon without delay. First a few words about this remarkable institution of ‘Chachi police’ whose prime responsibility is settling marital disputes and, if necessary, castigating those who breach the obligation of monogamy. The vernacular word for Policeman, *chaitaruku*, literally means ‘man with the baton’. They have the duty to beat or whip all those who are deemed at fault. Sometimes, they may even clench purported wrongdoers in the stocks. Significantly, such authoritative figures are also referred to with titles inspired by Hispano governmental and/or military nomenclature: *gobernador*, *capitán*, *policía*, etc.² However, Policemen are not chiefs. In ordinary life, they have the same status as anybody else. They may be widely respected, but they are not treated as hierarchical superiors. The position of Policeman is only assumed when a conflict arises or during very specific rituals.³

Divorce and adultery are among the main reasons for punishment. The following incident, which occurred in a village I often visited, is an example of how divorce is repressed. A woman in her early twenties had married

when she was very young and now wanted to leave her husband. However, the latter disagreed and so did both of their families. The rebellious woman was convicted to one hundred whiplashes. To illustrate how adultery is dealt with, I refer to a recent case in the same village. The culprit was a man who cheated on his wife. He was reproached for taking better care of his mistress and her children than of his own family. A Policeman chastised him with one hundred whiplashes. As the adulterer kept neglecting his wife another round of punishment followed, but this time the amount of whippings doubled. Despite the repeated chastisements the man refused to change his ways. In the end, some suggested to clench him in the stocks in the ceremonial centre, a measure that is only ever taken in extreme cases. Before that could be staged, however, the man fled from the village. It is worth noting that such chastisements are public events. Ideally, the whole village should witness it. The presumed culprits or their families are expected to pay the one who chastises a fine and to provide cigarettes and rum. The overall aim is to impress on the 'sinners' (*ujchalamu*) that they should change their ways and live well. If this fails, they are ostracized.

Obviously, Policemen are ritual experts of some kind. Their brightly coloured clothes and the cap they habitually wear, their paraphernalia (besides whips, they sometimes carry ornamented wands of dark hardwood), their liberal consumption of tobacco and rum, and the esoteric phrases they often mutter, all of this marks their special status—they are clearly not ordinary Chachi, at least not when they are carrying out their principal business of castigating. Policemen arguably practice some form of shamanism, which entails an element of metamorphosis. Previously, I have indicated that Humanity is not so much an inherent property as a position that should never be taken for granted. It always requires a specific effort that—in this case—is essentially the maintenance of a monogamous lifestyle. If one fails to do so one loses one's Chachi shape; that is, the inveterate adulterer *stops being Human*. Those who do not abide by the marriage norms enforced by the Policemen inevitably change shape. In fact, 'sinning' is shape-shifting, an idea supported by the abundance of stories in which people who behave inappropriately transform into all kinds of beasts and monsters. Insofar as they engage in a contrary effort, those who breach monogamy do indeed become Monsters.

The task of the Policemen, then, is to prevent unwanted shifts from the Human into the Monstrous. Their strategy is interesting: it emerges that in order to deal with a Monster, one temporarily has to turn into a Monster oneself. That is why Policemen act in a blatantly non-Human way during the punishment: they engage in a contrary effort, too. In ordinary circumstances, Chachi/Humans always stress their tranquil and peaceful proclivities. Aggressive demeanour such as whipping is the antithesis of such conduct and is more characteristic of the brutal Hispanic soldiers or the cruel hacienda bosses of the colonial era. Clenching people in the stocks, a torture instrument introduced by the Spanish conquistadors, also

indicates the Monstrosity of the Policeman. The latter's conspicuous consumption of tobacco and rum further marks his non-Human position, for Chachi people habitually never smoke or drink. In short, Policemen could be regarded as particularly skilled shape-shifters. They wilfully transform into Spaniard-like Monsters as a means to restore the shape of those who accidentally lost their Humanity. To be sure, these preliminary conclusions remain provisional. But for now it suffices to have a basic impression of the crucial role of shape-shifting. This brings us back to an anthropological goal that may have been given up too soon—the search for a 'General Theory of Magic'.

Of course, we will have to deal with some of the problems that bedevilled the enterprise of Hubert and Mauss. An important issue these pioneering authors have failed to address is that of the confusion between what is animate and what is alive. The view spread by adherents of the Western cosmology is that both notions overlap neatly. From this angle, life is taken to be an inherent property of all those who are animate. For example, Westerners are confident that the Policemen I have just described are 'alive' because they walk, talk, and breathe as any living Chachi does. But is this opinion really justified? Well, it is not—at least in regimes of animism. To be sure, Policemen are not less animate than Chachi; we are dealing with perfectly equivalent shapes. Yet, different shapes are by definition also incommensurable: this implies that if Chachi are Alive, Policemen must be Dead. The latter are indeed animate but Dead; they are Monsters. This introductory example is admittedly sketchy but it does give us a glimpse of something profound. We begin to see that the modern notion of life is actually an obstacle if one wants to grasp animism. What we need is a more appropriate conception of life, one that would allow us to understand more adequately how Chachi animists (and their colleagues elsewhere) handle situations of adversity. Instead of focussing on the modern biological conception of life, we have to study life as a positional quality. That is, I propose to investigate life as shape or—to stick to our habitual capitalization—Life.

TO CURE IS TO METAMORPHOSE INTO A MONSTER OR BEAST

The most effective way to grasp that animistic conception of life is to have a closer look at its counterpart: death. Many ethnographers who work with Amerindian peoples have been puzzled by the recurrent observation that the latter do not clearly separate altered states such as hallucination or illness from what they would consider true decease. Those who go into trance, become seriously ill, or simply lose consciousness are indiscriminately declared dead. For example, Chachi people often say that somebody who is very sick already has a coffin or *ujcungule*, which literally means 'canoe of the ghost' or 'canoe of the dead'. Significantly, not only

the patient is referred to as ghost (*ujmu*) but also the one who cures. To bring the former back to the living, the latter has to ‘break the canoe’ (*kule maleevinu*), a task that requires that he temporarily ‘dies’. Or should we rather say that he dies? Deciding whether one uses inverted commas or not is actually a crucial matter here. Modern writers usually do, to indicate that the curer is not really dead—they are convinced that it is merely a symbolical or metaphorical death. The curer thus merely enacts or impersonates a ghost. The present section, by contrast, shows that such an approach is not satisfactory. What is needed is a more adequate understanding of metamorphosis, and more particularly of how the Living shift into the Dead and vice versa.

One of the most common forms of adversity is illness, whereas shamanic curing is a classic example of magic. In order to familiarize the reader with those themes, the present section discusses one instance in some depth. I will focus on how Chachi shamans deal with the sick, drawing on a curing session I witnessed in the Cayapas area in 2004.

At one point, my host decided to invite a shaman as she had not been feeling too well for some time. In the vernacular, those who have the ability to cure are called *miruku*, which literally means ‘the man who knows’. For three consecutive nights, a curing rite took place at her house. Every night, the shaman set his *mesa*, an arrangement of instruments that he put on leaves on the floor. He had brought a wooden figurine representing a colonial police officer (*capitán*), an ornamented wand, various dark stones, an ancient stone axe, pre-Columbian potsherds, candles, a bottle of rum, a packet of cigarettes, and various plants. Each session began by spraying a mouthful of rum and blowing tobacco smoke over the instruments. The patient paid five dollars, money that the shaman placed under the arm of the policeman-statuettes in a conspicuous fashion. When everyone retired into their mosquito nets, the shaman remained in a hammock to sing, whistle, and hum throughout the night. Tobacco smoke and rum were blown over the *mesa* repeatedly. The chants were quite distinct from ordinary songs. Sung neither in local Spanish nor in the vernacular, they were delivered in what sounded like an archaic form of Spanish mixed with Quichua expressions, sometimes drifting into a wholly incomprehensible esoteric language. I here present a few excerpts with an approximate translation in English. However, I stress that the imagery is more complex than what I recite. Many incantation formulae were unintelligible because the shaman often mumbled too silently or sang too fast. Other disturbances included the crying of little children, some of the participants’ snoring, and the pop-music in the nearby village.

Ush!

Oriente cerro

Oriente cerro venga

Cerro Imbabura

Mountaintop of the Orient

Mountaintop of the Orient come

Imbabura mountaintop

<i>Cerro venga</i>	Mountaintop come
<i>A mi diablo cerro</i>	Oh my Devil mountaintop
<i>Vamos alumbrar</i>	Let us lighten
<i>Oriente cerro</i>	Mountaintop of the Orient
<i>A mi cuerpo lumbrando</i>	Oh lightening my body
<i>Lumbrar lumbrar lumbrar</i>	Lighten, lighten, lighten
<i>Venga</i>	Come
<i>Vamos Oriente cerro</i>	Let us go mountaintop of the Orient
<i>Vamos lumbrar</i>	Let us lighten
<i>Venga venga cerro</i>	Come, come mountaintop
<i>Cerro cerro cerro</i>	Mountaintop, mountaintop, mountaintop
<i>Vamos cantando, vamos</i>	
<i>limpiando</i>	Let us sing, let us cleanse
<i>Cuerpo lumbrar</i>	Lighten the body
<i>Ush! Usha!</i>	
<i>Usha!</i>	
<i>A tunda bravo</i>	Oh ferocious Hill Dweller
<i>Gente cuerpo dañado</i>	People/damaged body
<i>Arco vamos romper</i>	Let us break the rainbow
<i>Colombiano cerro levantando</i>	Mountaintop of the Colombians rising
<i>Vamos bailando</i>	Let us dance
<i>A mi tunda bravo</i>	Oh my ferocious Hill Dweller
<i>Vamos alumbrar cuerpo</i>	Let us lighten the body
<i>Tunda vamos rompiendo</i>	Let us break the Hill Dweller
<i>Cerro venga venga</i>	Mountaintop come, come
<i>Usha!</i>	

A central feature of the songs is the calling of various mountaintops which have to come towards the shaman. These mountaintops are conceived of as helpers of the curer. They are called *valientes*, which means the 'brave ones'. Some correspond to specific volcanoes and snow-capped summits of the Andean landscape. However, most of them are not encountered on any geographic map. The more mountaintops a shaman knows, the more powerful he is deemed to be. The whistling and the humming are said to be ways of seducing the mountaintops. The dark stones are also used to entice them; it is said that the brave ones perceive them as attractively coloured birds such as macaws and parrots. The wooden policeman figurine and other shamanic instruments are also referred to as *valientes*. In fact, they are envisaged as the 'children of the mountaintops' (*hijos de los cerros*). The brave ones are requested to lighten the obscured bodies of those who are afflicted. One man described this as a kind of X-raying whereby the shaman checks the body for stones causing the illness. In the vernacular this examination is referred to as *keepukutinu*, literally 'to peel away the outer shell of the body'. Finally, the curer calls upon a *tunda*, the local Spanish term for Hill Dweller. The phrase

arco vamos romper is an explicit utterance to ward off such monsters, for rainbows are thought to be their paths (my host family's house was indeed deemed to be plagued by Hill Dwellers). On the last night my host had prepared *chicha*, maize beer. The curing session reached a climax.

Ush!

<i>A mi diablo cerro</i>	Oh my Devil mountaintop
<i>A mi cerro venga venga</i>	Oh my mountaintop come, come
<i>Otavalo cerro venga</i>	Otavalo mountaintop come
<i>A mi Esmeraldas cerro venga</i>	Oh my Esmeraldas mountaintop come
<i>Vamos cantando</i>	Let us sing
<i>Cuerpo enfermo</i>	Sick body
<i>Vamos guardando</i>	Let us guard
<i>A mi quatro policía</i>	Oh my four Policemen
<i>Vamos bailando</i>	Let us dance
<i>Vamos soplando</i>	Let us blow
<i>A mi quatro policía</i>	Oh my four Policemen
<i>A mi quatro diablo cerro</i>	Oh my four Devil mountaintops
<i>Vamos levantando</i>	Let us rise
<i>A venga venga tunda bravo</i>	Oh come, come ferocious Hill Dweller
<i>Avionetta vamos caminando</i>	Airplane let us go
<i>Carro vamos caminando</i>	Automobile let us go
<i>Con su escopeta manaba</i>	With your shotgun Guerrilla-Fighter
<i>Quatro indios bravos</i>	Four Ferocious Indians
<i>Vamos soplando</i>	Let us blow
<i>Con su manaba</i>	With your Guerrilla-Fighter
<i>Vamos caminando</i>	Let us walk
<i>Tunda bravo nunca viene</i>	Ferocious Hill Dweller never come back
<i>Ha mi diablo bandera</i>	Ha my Devil's flag
<i>Tunda bravo vamos caminando</i>	Ferocious Hill Dweller let us walk
<i>Ha policía levantando</i>	Ha Policeman rising
<i>Con su escopeta vamos golpeando</i>	With your shotgun let us punch
<i>Policía con su escopeta caminando</i>	Policeman walking with your shotgun
<i>Tunda bravo nunca viene</i>	Ferocious Hill Dweller never come back
<i>Bien flechando este Tunda</i>	Shooting that Hill Dweller with an arrow
<i>Quatro diablo cerro levantando</i>	Four Devil's Mountaintops rising
<i>Quatro indio bravo cerro levantando</i>	Four Ferocious Indian Mountaintops rising

<i>A mi tunda bravo vamos soplando</i>	Oh my ferocious Hill Dweller let us blow
<i>Cuerpo dañado</i>	Damaged body
<i>A quatro caballo vamos soplando</i>	Four horses let us blow
<i>Vamos caminando</i>	Let us walk
<i>Tierra lejos nunca viene tunda bravo</i>	Land faraway/ never come back ferocious Hill Dweller
<i>Tunda bravo asustando</i>	Ferocious Hill Dweller/ frightening
<i>Ush, ush, ush!</i>	

In the ultimate night of curing, the shaman pushes his limits. He calls upon all mountaintops he knows and invites them to sing, to dance, and to guard the house. A veritable battle ensues during which various brave ones—Policemen, Ferocious Indians, Devils, and Guerrilla-Fighters—are mobilised against a malicious Hill Dweller. The brave ones appear to chase the Hill Dweller over land by horse and by car, and in the air by plane. The pursuers have guns and launch darts. Phrases like *tunda bravo asustando* suggest that the aim is to frighten the Hill Dweller so that it goes far away and never comes back. In fact, some shamans specify that it should be locked up in cavities or tree dungeons in the forest. Others claim to drive it to the open sea, where it is dropped on uninhabited islands. As an extra protective measure, the shaman invokes a ‘Devil’s flag’, which is described as a kind of invisible fire wall against all kinds of malevolent attack. Near dawn, when the curer had stopped singing, the bowls with maize beer were uncovered. The patient got up, went round and blew beer all over the house. The contents of several more bowls were spat around, also in the kitchen and outside the house, whereas the shaman blew tobacco and repeatedly cried *ush*.

Before I discuss this séance in more detail, it is useful to mention a myth about the origin of shamanism. It involves an opossum, a small mammal that allegedly often appears in houses where people are ill. Once upon a time, such an opossum transformed into a person and started to treat the sick: it was the first shaman, who taught the Chachi how to cure. Afterwards, it returned to the forest and changed back into its previous shape. The opossum did not need its wand and its stones anymore now. The wand became its tail and the stones (there were two of them) became its testicles. Such accounts may appear frivolous, but they should be taken seriously. Actually, everything indicates that shamans should be considered precisely as these suggest: they are primarily shape-shifters. Whereas there is little that makes them stand out from their fellow Chachi in ordinary circumstances, that changes quite abruptly when they begin to cure. I would argue that the curer is no longer Chachi. Blowing tobacco and singing chants, he is no longer Human. He shifts into a variety of shapes that are obviously non-Human: he becomes a Monster. It is no coincidence that all the brave ones/mountaintops that are invoked possess a distinctly monstrous facet. We know that Hill Dwellers (*bu’chulla, tunda*) are envisaged as aggressive

and warlike. Policemen (*policía, capitán*), Ferocious Indians (*indios bravos, uyala*), Guerrilla-Fighters (*manaba, colombianos*), and Devils (*diablo, diabulu*) are equally dangerous; they are the epitome of wildness and cruelty, as I have already shown in the chapter on Monsters.

In short, shamanic curing can be understood as an instance of shape-shifting. Before I elaborate on what exactly I mean by this, it is useful to underline some notable features. The shaman's paraphernalia depict or at least allude to all kinds of fearsome outsiders, especially white policemen and soldiers from the colonial era. The wooden *capitán*-figurine and the hardwood wand ornamented with the image of a cap-wearing military officer are exemplary in this respect. Figurines representing exotic (non-Chachi) Indians or Blacks are also reported.⁴ The dark stones and archaeological artefacts such as potsherds, polished stone axes, and obsidian mirrors are said to originate from the Ferocious Indians. Leaf bundles of 'Hill Dweller's plant' (*bu'chuitape*) and 'River Dweller's plant' (*pichuitape*) are linked to the respective monsters from which they derive their name.⁵ Some shamans also use the teeth or claws of notorious predators such as the puma or the condor. All the instruments on the shaman's *mesa* have a distinctly exogenous touch; all of it is conspicuously Monstrous. I emphasize that the consumption of tobacco, rum, and fermented drinks such as maize beer is not an everyday affair, but restricted to specific ritual occasions. Chachi people do not usually smoke or drink in the daytime, and certainly not for reasons of sheer conviviality.⁶ Cigarettes and rum are store-bought items, imported from the city, which implies a substantial financial investment on behalf of the patient's family. That money is involved seems to be important in itself. In any case, the money paid for a cure is usually displayed rather prominently. Finally, I wish to underscore once more that the curer sings in a kind of archaic Spanish, that is, in an ostentatiously non-Chachi idiom. Many of the expressions he uses are completely incomprehensible, even for the patients themselves.

The crux of the matter now becomes evident: the curer turns into a brave one. Blowing tobacco and singing esoteric chants, he is no longer Chachi. He has shifted from a Human shape into that of a Monster or a Beast. Manipulating his figurine, he is a Policeman; tapping his stone axe on the floor, he is a Ferocious Indian; using the body parts of a feline or a raptor bird, he is that Beast; handling specific bundles of leaves, he is a Hill Dweller, a River Dweller or whatever shape the plant corresponds to. A striking element which my informants emphasized time and again is that all these manifestations of the monstrous or the bestial have one rather terrible characteristic in common, namely their craving for human flesh. In the vernacular, they are subsumed under the rubric of *uyala*, a notion that traditionally designated both non-Chachi and man-eaters. What is more, Chachi shamans are sometimes explicitly referred to as *cha'fimu*, 'eaters of Chachi'. My contention is that the curer does not sing about Policemen, Hill Dwellers, Guerrilla-Fighters, and so on. Neither does he sing to

them—rather, in the act of chanting he *is* them. What happens is a metamorphosis from the Human into the Monstrous. It should be stressed that the curer does not act *like* a Monster; he is not an enactor or an impersonator. We are not dealing with mere mimesis. Rather, the chants prompt a Monster-becoming, where Monstrosity is not an inherent characteristic but a quality of the act; it is premised on what I have called a contrary effort.⁷

Taking things a step further, we could say that the shaman is no longer Alive but Dead. We already know that Monstrosity and Humanity correspond to equivalent but incommensurable shapes. Equivalent, because Hill Dwellers and all the rest are equally tangible and equally animate as Chachi; there is no qualitative difference between the temporarily non-Human curer and ordinary Humans. Incommensurable, because these Monsters and Chachi have absolutely nothing in common. If the latter are Human, the former are not. If the latter are Alive, the former are Dead. In short, by transforming into a Monster or Beast the curer necessarily dies. This death is not merely symbolic or metaphoric. In so far that it is based on a specific (if contrary) effort, it is exactly as ‘real’ as life. Within animism, there is no distinction in kind between Life and Death. The latter dichotomy does not overlap with that between the organic and the inorganic. Contrary to adherents of the modern cosmology, animists do not confuse life with the animate. Likewise, they refuse to mix up death with the inert. For them, Life and Death are positional qualities. The skill of a shaman is primarily measured by his capacity to shift between both positions. In sum, the entire endeavour of curing is premised on a metamorphosis from the Living into the Dead.

Now I turn to the questions that evidently follow. Why is the shaman a Monster, and, how can a Monster possibly help the patient? Why does the curer die, and, how can somebody who is no longer Alive provide a cure? To answer this it is essential to grasp that becoming ill is first and foremost an instance of metamorphosis.⁸ More precisely, illness is an event of involuntary shape-shifting. It is conceived of as losing one’s Human shape or indeed as losing one’s Life. The patient becomes a Monster; she or he is simultaneously animate and Dead. In our example, the problem is not so much that my host was attacked by a Hill Dweller; rather, she risked *turning into* one. Several elements support this idea of a Monstrous patient. Blowing maize beer is unthinkable in everyday circumstances. Actually, it is the exact opposite of what ordinary Chachi do, namely the consumption of plantains. Maize is not a staple crop; it is explicitly referred to as the food of Monsters (Ferocious Indians are said to eat maize for example). The ingestion of food is contrasted to expelling ‘anti-food’; to blow beer is to engage in a contrary effort. Acting in such a way indicates that one is no longer Chachi, one is no longer Human. In other words, it shows that one is no longer Alive but Dead. Moreover, tobacco and alcohol are also envisaged as non-Human substances. The frequent exhaling of smoke and the spraying of rum over patients further underlines their Monstrosity. In short, we have established that to become ill is to stop being Alive.

Here we have a plausible explanation as to why people such as the Chachi tend to declare somebody dead ‘too quickly’, that is, before they are properly deceased according to modern medical standards. If we accept that curing amounts to shape-shifting and, more precisely, to a transformation from the Living into the Dead then the puzzle is easily resolved. To conclude, I note that this transformation is usually conceived of as either eating or seduction. The curer must prevent his patient from being eaten (*finu*) or seduced (*mikanu*). I have already pointed out that Monsters such as Hill Dwellers are deemed to be man-eaters. Yet, the eating of Chachi is not a matter of total annihilation but rather one of metamorphosis. The eaten becomes the eater, the prey is transformed into the predator; not surprisingly, this is one of the most recurrent themes in Chachi mythology. The other possibility—seduction—often occurs in myths as well. The Hill Dweller, in the form of an attractive man or woman, lures its victim away from the Chachi world in a move that prefaces his or her transformation. In sum, the curing rite is primarily a conflict over shapes. If illness is shifting into a Monster beyond one’s own power, then the task of the shaman is to bring his patients back into their Human shape. To use an alternative expression: if the patients are Dead, then the shaman must make them Alive again. The only way he can accomplish this is by transforming into a Monster himself; that is, he is obliged to die. Just like his patient, the shaman stops being Alive. The ever-recurring principle is that in order to confront a culprit successfully, it is imperative to adopt a similar position. But is this also the case more widely?

ANIMISM AND MISFORTUNE

Amazonia—Curing and Raiding among the Wari’

Wari’ people tend to attribute illness to purposeful attacks, either from predatory animals or human-like enemies. Illness is indeed conceived of as a form of warfare. For protection they rely on their shamans, who are always individuals that have survived a grave illness themselves.⁹ Disease and its cure are explicitly envisaged as a metamorphosis. ‘If somebody falls ill’, Aparecida Vilaça notes, ‘the shaman must avoid that the patient transforms into an animal’.¹⁰ To be effective, the curer has to cultivate a special relation with his adversary. The recovery of the patient depends on his ability to assume a different point of view. More precisely, the shaman must adopt the perspective of the aggressor. As a result, he and his adversaries view each other as Wari’, whereas his fellow Wari’ no longer see him as one of them.¹¹ Vilaça gives the following example: ‘ . . . animals see him as a fellow human being, whereas he can appear as an animal to the Wari’. It is said that the shaman *jamu*, he metamorphoses. Alternatively, people say that he is now accompanied by such or such an animal’.¹² She emphasizes

that the key condition to transform into a specific creature is to share its food.¹³ To change species, Vilaça explains, it is essential to refrain from one's ordinary diet and to eat similar food as the one who you 'accompany'. For example, if a shaman turns into a feline he will eat raw flesh. Commensality results in becoming identical. The same goes when a shaman transforms into an enemy.

In the end, what is at stake is whether one ends up as predator or as prey. Vilaça writes: 'If animals are potentially human, the Wari' are potentially prey; humanity is thus not something inherent but a position for which one has to fight without pause.'¹⁴ This confirms, once more, that Humanity requires a perpetual effort. Wari' shamanism can only be understood within a framework of shapes, where the key positions are those of Predator and Prey. Strictly speaking, the curer does not change into an 'animal' or an 'enemy' for this would imply that his adversaries are *just a little bit* different (i.e. they are assumed to be 'other living beings' or 'other humans'). In fact, they are *very* different for we are dealing with incommensurable shapes that have neither 'life' nor 'humanity' in common with the Wari': the shaman turns into a Beast or a Monster. What happens during the cure is a change of shapes, whereby Predators (Wari'/Humans) shift into Prey (Beasts/Monsters). If this argument is correct, one should expect to find that the shaman temporarily dies, for if the former are Alive, the latter must be Dead. That is indeed the case, at least implicitly: just like curing, death is envisaged as metamorphosis, as will be shown in the next chapter. In short, curing entails a shift from the Living into the Dead.

The same argument can be made with regards to 'real' warfare. Before the contact, the Wari' frequently engaged in what could be described as a kind of pre-emptive raiding. Such expeditions could take more than a week, as the warriors often had to cross vast expanses of forest. Their preferred strategy of attack was one of 'hit-and-run'. The warriors—armed with bows and arrows—would hide themselves in the vicinity of a hostile settlement and ambush those who happened to pass by. They would never attack the settlement directly and had absolutely no interest in any kind of open battle. The goal was to kill as much 'prey' as possible, as they expressed it. The arms, legs, and head would be cut off from the corpse and were taken along, tied in front of the warrior with a liana—that is, in exactly the same way as a hunter brings back his prey. Back home, they would be received with great joy. Habitually, the adversary's flesh was smoked and served. However, only those who had not participated in the attack were allowed to eat from it. The warriors themselves had to go in reclusion for some time. Among other things, their hair was shaved off (Wari' men always kept their hair long in ordinary circumstances). The actual procedure was more complex, but this basic sketch suffices to see that the raiders were shape-shifters. Tentatively, I suggest that warriors are not Humans but Monsters. When they go in reclusion they are no longer Alive but Dead.

How Matis React to Epidemics

As many other Amerindian groups the Matis have greatly suffered from epidemics, especially during the second half of the 20th century when contacts with the Brazilian mainstream society intensified. However, their response to these subsequent crises has been rather original. First I should say that Matis people generally attribute illness to what they call *sho* and the excess of 'bitterness' associated with it.¹⁵ The Matis' reaction to the sudden, excessive mortality was a spontaneous ban on all *sho*-related activities such as the preparation of curare.¹⁶ Philippe Erikson summarizes: 'In the face of disaster, the Matis have sought to avoid extinction by abolishing or, at least, minimizing that what they considered as the ultimate cause of their misfortune: *sho*.'¹⁷ By the way, this specific strategy to come to terms with a traumatic experience is probably much older than one may be inclined to think; it should not necessarily be interpreted as an instance of acculturation. For example, the abandonment of at least one pre-eminently shamanic substance, tobacco, dates from long before the great epidemics. From clues such as this Erikson concludes that we should not over-estimate the influence of Whites:

In fact, it is likely that by renouncing *sho* the Matis only resorted to an age-old tactic which they had already used many times before. The move was not so much a radical break with their past as the amplification of an ancient tendency which was merely reinforced by the brutality of the recent epidemics.¹⁸

I endorse this conclusion fully, but add that various key issues can be clarified by specifying the role of metamorphosis. The notion of *sho* denotes a specific shape; those who are imbued with it are Dead. In Matis animism, becoming ill implies that one is no longer Alive but Dead. Those who cure the sick can only be effective if they adopt the same shape as their patients. In other words, they are obliged to die temporarily. That is why the Matis literally used to say that their shamans were 'killed' when they inhaled drugs.¹⁹

Within animism such temporary deaths are nothing special: I have already demonstrated that Matis hunters shift between the Living and the Dead in a very comparable manner, although their specific techniques differ slightly. Whereas the latter use curare, the former rely on hallucinogens that are also qualified as 'bitter'. Dying always requires a contrary effort; in the case of shamans it is the eating of anti-food, that is, the ingestion of bitter-tasting substances. What the great epidemics seem to have triggered among the Matis is a widespread lack of confidence concerning the possibility to 'come back' from the realm of the Dead. For fear of not being able to return to the Living, they no longer dare to die temporarily.

North America—The Navajo Coyote-way

Within Navajo animism, a great diversity of methods to deal with illness and misfortune has been developed. In the ethnography, these are usually designated as ‘-ways’: red ant-way, big star-way, coyote-way, and so forth. Whatever the specific method, the overall aim is always to restore *hózhó*—beauty, harmony, well-being.²⁰ In this section I will focus on the coyote-way, which is associated with uncontrollable shaking and rabies. ‘Coyote’ must be understood broadly in this context: it can also refer to bobcats, grey foxes, and skunks, not coincidentally all potential carriers of rabies. Coyote-way is an elaborate procedure, stretching over various days and nights. In a curing session documented by Karl W. Luckert, all those who participated shared a meal of ground maize, served in a seashell.²¹ A new fire was made, reed-sticks were stuffed with corn-pollen and tobacco and covered with turquoise-paint, and the feathers of blue jays and bluebirds were put on a blue blanket. These various items were then sprinkled with pollen from corn (of a ‘blue’ variety), cattail reeds, and blue flowers, along with powdered seaweeds, algae, and ocean foam. From the curer’s singing, one can infer that these were presents for the Blue Coyote: ‘beautiful feathers I bring to you . . . beautiful tobacco I bring to you . . . blue turquoise beads I bring to you’.²²

When the curer applied his blue medicine to the patient’s skin, the perspective shifted: ‘This is the fur, this is the fur . . . These are put on the fur’.²³ The patient was now identified with the Blue Coyote; his skin had become its fur. What is more, the curer himself also assumed the position of a Blue Coyote, walking in the woods, trotting along a path, accompanying the patient: ‘. . . in the blue fur I am walking, as I am walking with him’.²⁴ During the final part of the procedure even more coyotes appear. First, a sand painting is made by trickling coloured powders over a smooth patch of sand. In the case described by Luckert, eight anthropomorphic ‘coyote-girls’ were depicted, two for each cardinal direction. They were separated by four maize plants and surrounded by a circular rainbow. At night, when the patient has been placed inside the circle, the girls appeared, precisely as depicted in the sand. Blue-masked figures entered the room and sprinkled the patient with blue medicine. Carrying a stuffed grey fox (i.e. a Blue Coyote) and baskets with maize ears, they then proceeded to apply cornmeal to the patient’s body. Finally, they howled and made frantic throwaway motions, thus ‘throwing away’ the illness.

The whole procedure is an instance of metamorphosis, whereby Navajo transformed into Coyotes, Humans into Beasts, the Living into the Dead. Rabies was envisaged as turning into a Blue Coyote, a Beast that dwells underwater. The curer could only help the patient if he adopted a similar viewpoint; successful recovery hinged on whether they managed to perceive each other as equals. This thesis is confirmed by what people tell about the origins of the coyote-way. In one account, a hunter followed a coyote track into a pool of water surrounded by reeds. He discovered

a land inhabited by coyotes, but underwater these appeared as humans: they lived in houses and grew maize. Eventually, they instructed the hunter about the coyote-way; the latter became the first Navajo curer.²⁵ Arguably, this myth is an almost exact template of what happens during the cure. I would suggest that to travel underwater is a contrary effort; it is to die temporarily. Likewise, the treatment with all sorts of bluish items amounts to a change of shape. The curer, an expert shape-shifter, is no longer Alive but Dead. Restoring *hózhó* is recovering Humanity and to reinstall beauty is to regain Life.

The Lakota Buffalo Ceremony

The competence of shamans or medicine men is not necessarily limited to dealing with illness. It is often solicited at specific occasions, especially during so-called rites of passage. The Lakota 'buffalo ceremony', which used to be conducted on the occasion of a girl's first menstrual flow, is a good example.²⁶ Ethnographers tell us it was a fairly straightforward affair, apparently aimed at inclining one's daughter to become industrious and hospitable. Some details deserve our attention. The ceremony took place in a special tipi full of sagebrush, chokecherries, and sweetgrass. A fire would be made from dried cottonwood, while food and presents were prepared for the guests. The prestige of the girl was envisaged as proportionate to the number of guests and to the generosity of the hosts (normally her parents). A buffalo skull would be placed on an earth mound inside the tipi. When everybody had arrived the shaman entered, his body painted red, and black stripes drawn across his face. Wearing a skin-cap with buffalo horns at the side and a pendant with a buffalo tail hanging down his back, he would approach the fire with a pipe. After lighting some tobacco, he blew smoke into the nostrils and eye sockets of the buffalo skull. Finally, the pipe would be passed around. Outside, the girl donned a new dress and let her hair down about her shoulders, just as mourners do. When ready she was led into the tipi, at which point drumming and singing began. The shaman would dance towards her. On one occasion, this is what happened next:

He then got on his hands and knees near the door and bellowed like a bull, pawing the earth and throwing it up as bulls do. Then he sniffed as if trying to scent something and then came on his hands and knees slowly towards the girl, lowing as the bull does when mating. . . . He then took [a] wooden bowl and, putting water in it, mixed chokecherries with the water, singing a song without words while doing so. He then said to the girl: 'We are buffalos on the plains. Here is a waterhole. It is red to show that it is *wakan*, and belongs to the buffalo woman. Drink from it.' He placed the bowl in front of the girl and she stooped and drank from it.²⁷

The girl was addressed as a young cow. Her forehead was painted red just as the buffalo skull, referred to as her older sister. 'You are now a woman', the shaman concluded, 'The buffalo woman is your oldest sister. Go out of this lodge.'²⁸ What happens, I would suggest, is a metamorphosis whereby Lakota turn into Buffalos, Humans into Beasts. We are dealing with equivalent but incommensurable shapes. Equivalent because Buffalos are equally tangible and equally animate as Humans. Incommensurable because the former must be Dead if the latter are Alive. For Buffalos are Beasts: they are animate but Dead. We should not be surprised that the girl—the young buffalo cow—wears her hair just as mourners do. Neither is it a coincidence that she is painted red, a colour associated with death. During the whole ceremony, she is Dead. Substances such as sagebrush and tobacco are also closely linked to death. All those who smoke the pipe and all those who drink from the chokecherry mixture are no longer Humans but Buffalos, no longer Alive but Dead. The shaman is the principal shape-shifter, but his position is not intrinsically different from that of the other participants.

The Northern Pacific Rim—How Yup'ik Avert Famine, Disease

Previously, I have focussed on Yup'ik whale hunting. However, seals are the main concern of these intrepid sea mammal hunters. At the end of winter, when the light lengthens and leads begin to open in the near-shore ice, bearded seals appear. As the ice pack recedes through spring, ringed and spotted seals follow their bearded colleagues on their way north. The availability of these various kinds of seal is fraught with uncertainty. 'Seals congregate near floating ice floes', Ann Fienup-Riordan explains, 'and strong north winds that blow the ice away as it breaks off from the shore pack mean poor hunting'.²⁹ In Yup'ik animism, the avoidance of famine depends on the appropriate conduct of the hunter and his wife. Those who 'live thoughtlessly' risk going hungry or becoming ill. 'The condition of being ill was directly comparable to the predicament of the unsuccessful hunter', Fienup-Riordan notes. And she adds: 'Just as successful hunting and physical wellbeing were tied to following the rules, so failure in the hunt and failure of the body resulted from thoughtless living'.³⁰ What ethnographers refer to as 'the hunter' and 'the shaman' are not clearly distinguishable in such a context. The aromatic smoke of tundra plants such as wild celery and Labrador tea is used to treat the hunters' equipment and to cure illness. Moreover both hunters and curers often wore special belts made of caribou incisors.³¹ But let us return to the issue of appropriate conduct.

According to Yup'ik hunters, seals come to them of their own volition, in response to respectful treatment. What does this treatment entail, exactly? For one thing, it is intricately linked to clearing passageways. Young hunters are expected to remove snow and refuse from paths, shovel house entries, and keep waterholes free of ice all the time. Thus, they not only prevent illness but also prepare a passageway for the seals to come to their village.³²

At sea, hunters used to identify themselves with small ocean-going birds such as murrelets and eider ducks. Fienup-Riordan asserts that, from a seal's viewpoint, the hunter and his kayak appeared as such a bird:³³

Wearing hunting hats decorated with either the feathers or the images of ocean-going birds, and paddling a kayak decorated with a bird motif, the hunter became such a bird in the eyes of the seals he sought.³⁴

Seals, so it is claimed, are irresistibly drawn to such seabirds (and it is true that both kinds of animals are often observed together). But that is not all. As mentioned before, the hunter's wife also plays a crucial role. During the hunt, she quietly waits in the house, refraining from any act that might 'cut' the seals' path. Her deliberate inactivity aims to evoke a comparable passivity on the part of the seal, what allows her husband to capture it with relative ease.³⁵ The seal is envisaged as an honoured guest who longs for fresh water and it is the wife's responsibility to quench its thirst. When it is brought into the house, she 'gives it a drink'. That is, she sprinkles snow on its mouth and anoints its flippers with water. Those who failed to care for their guests properly brought their own future in jeopardy, for the seals would refuse to visit again.

If this happened, one could still take recourse to shamans, who occasionally undertook journeys to the ocean floor in order to convince the seals to come back.³⁶ From their descriptions, we know that seals view themselves as humans. Just like Yup'ik, they live in communal men's houses. In some accounts, each variety of seal corresponds to a specific type of humans—spotted seals are perceived as humans with sores, harbour seals as humans with big eyes, etc.³⁷ Again, we notice that metamorphosis is at the heart of the matter. Human and Seal, Hunter and Prey, Host and Guest, must be understood as equivalent but incommensurable shapes. From the viewpoint of the Living, the Hunter transforms into a Seabird. From the viewpoint of the Dead, the Seal transforms into a Guest. The hunter in his kayak and his deliberately inactive wife become Beasts: they are animate but Dead. As such, they are able to perceive Seals, who are not wildlife but Beasts, as fellow Humans or Guests. This gives us a clue about why Yup'ik hunters never boast about harpooning seals. To envisage the undertaking as 'receiving a guest' is not some ingenious way of brushing aside purported feelings of guilt. Rather, one must consider the absurdity of killing something that is already Dead. In short, hunting seals implies a metamorphosis from the Living into the Dead.

Ainu Headaches, Fatigue

In a report on Ainu shamanic healing, Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney mentions the apparent paradox that *kamuy* (what she translates as 'demons') are envisaged as both the cause of all kinds of illnesses and as a source of

curing power. For example, excessive sleeping, or a perpetual feeling of fatigue are attributed to demons identified as otters. Other forms of sickness are attributed to snakes and hornets. In all such cases the patient is overtaken by the *kamuy* of these respective creatures; in fact, diseases were conceived of as *kamuy*.³⁸ Even ordinary headaches are understood in those terms. 'Musk deer headaches' resemble the galloping sound of a musk deer, 'woodpecker headaches' give one the impression of a woodpecker drilling into a tree trunk, 'crab headaches' resemble the prickling feeling of a crab walking over one's skin, and 'octopus headaches' feel like the sucking of an octopus.³⁹ Whereas these various species are conceived of as the source of affliction, they are also deemed indispensable in order to provide a cure. The albatross is yet another example: diseases thought to originate from the sea can only be remedied by means of these quintessential seabirds.⁴⁰ That is why all such creatures are offered food, saké, and curled shavings attached to willow sticks. They are said to assist shamans when the latter acquire the power of the *kamuy*, a process which Ohnuki-Tierney interprets as a form of spirit possession:

[A] shaman's facial expression and voice change at this time, and his normal voice and expression are replaced by strange ones . . . The persons attending a rite are often able to tell which spirit is possessing the shaman, since he may simulate the spirit either in voice or in act. A shaman possessed by the grasshopper spirit, for example, may hop about.⁴¹

Curing rites are performed after sunset, inside the house beside the hearth. During the rite, hearth embers provide the only light. The shaman normally initiates the proceedings by beating a drum and by placing various kinds of aromatic plants, such as leek and spruce branches, on the embers. Fir branches and shaved willow sticks are waved over the patient's body. Both male and female shamans are said to assume the properties of *kamuy*. Much of what they utter during a trance involves 'the language of the deities', a set of expressions only used by elders on ceremonial occasions.⁴² Throughout the night, she or he would drink sea water from a lacquer bowl. Although Ainu consider sea water too salty for human consumption shamans may ingest two or three bowls, because it is not they themselves but *kamuy* who supposedly drink it. What takes place is, in fact, not so much a possession as a metamorphosis. The Ainu patient transforms into an Otter, an Octopus, or an Albatross. Strictly speaking, the latter are not wildlife but Beasts: they are at the same time animate and Dead. In other words, those who suffer from headaches or fatigue are no longer Alive but Dead. In order to help, the curer must adopt a similar position—she or he has to die temporarily. The shaman therefore changes shape, from Ainu to Grasshopper for example. In more general terms, he metamorphoses from Human into Beast, from the Living into the Dead. Drumming, drinking sea water, sprinkling sake, and

everything else that happens during the rite are contrary efforts. Those who cure are no longer Alive.

South Asia—On Protecting Oneself Against Devourers

How do Batek and Chewong people of Peninsular Malaysia deal with adversity? Kirk Endicott asserts that the Batek use the term *bala* 'Devourers' 'both for superhuman beings and for human shamans'.⁴³ In a similar vein, Chewong shamans are endowed with 'cool eyes', just like the *bas*, a notion I have also translated as 'Devourers'. The occasional attacks that such Devourers undertake on people are envisaged as the direct cause for all sorts of illness and misfortune. Again we see that one and the same entity is both source and cure of the affliction. Batek and Chewong shamans cure their patients by means of spells and songs full of obscure Malay and Arabic expressions. Endicott notes that 'many words are distorted or have different meanings in songs than in normal speech'.⁴⁴ Such esoteric incantations are deemed to attract the Devourers. Odour is also a key factor; curers always use sweet-smelling herbs and flowers and blow incense smoke over their patients. These ritual procedures allow shamans to identify temporarily with all kinds of Devourers. Perhaps most frequently, they assume the shape of Tigers.⁴⁵ This capacity to metamorphose is not only attributed to shamans but also to their adversaries; one can never trust outward appearances. Significantly, those who cause illness are not conceived of as malicious *per se*. The veritable problem is that they have, as Signe Howell puts it, 'different eyes'. Thus, Tigers do not perceive themselves as man-eaters from their own point of view, but rather as hunters going after legitimate (i.e., non-human) prey.⁴⁶

Ultimately, illness always results from a confusion of perspectives. Howell provides an admirable illustration, which I here present abridged and slightly paraphrased:

One day, a Chewong man hit an elephant in the flank with his spear. The wounded animal ran away and the man went after it. He followed its bloody trail through the jungle and, eventually, ended up in the land of the elephants. He arrived at a house and entered it. In their own land, elephants take off their cloaks and become people; they gave our man food and in the evening everyone sat about chatting. They told him about an old man who had suddenly gotten very sick. Later onwards, it was decided to pay the unfortunate man a visit. Upon arrival in the patient's house, our man immediately recognized his spear, stuck in the old man's flank. The elephant hosts could not see any spear, wound, or blood. Only our man saw it. He uttered healing spells and removed the spear, after which the patient quickly recovered.⁴⁷

Importantly, the man who recounted this story added: 'It is the same way with us when a Devourer has thrown its spear at us. We cannot see it, we only feel very ill'. Howell concludes: 'The analogy with conceptions about attack by [Devourers] on humans is obvious. When [Devourers] shoot their darts or spears at human beings, these cannot be seen, but they do cause illness. The [shaman] can, through the aid of the smoke and spells, both see and extract these weapons.'⁴⁸ In sum, we always have two incommensurable but equivalent positions: Chewong and Elephant, Batek and Tiger or—more generally—Human and Devourer. Dealing with adversity requires the skill of shifting between these respective shapes. The patient loses his Human shape and changes into a Devourer. To be effective, the curer must do the same. Devourers are Monsters or Beasts; they may be animate, but they are not Alive. In the end, what takes place is a transformation from the Living into the Dead.

When Ongees Lose Weight

In Ongee animism, the primary way of protecting oneself against adversity is to restrict the release of smell from one's body. Illness and its indicative loss of weight are caused by wind-spirits who hunt humans by taking in their odours. In the vernacular, these 'spirits' are referred to as *tomya*, what I previously translated as Absorbers. When Ongees want to state that they are not feeling well, they literally say 'I am light'.⁴⁹ It entails the idea that one is not getting enough to eat because one does not live together in a group, where food is always shared and people remain heavy. The campsites of such groups are envisaged as a kind of safe heaven; the central hearth protects people from the winds and the dispersal of smell.⁵⁰ To become light and its concurrent loss of smell amounts to an involuntary metamorphosis: 'by absorbing the smell of humans', Vishvajit Pandya explains, 'the spirits transform humans into spirits'.⁵¹ In my own words: Ongees shift into Absorbers, Humans turn into Winds. The protracted loss of weight is a contrary effort; it is literally becoming wind-like. The concordant control of one's smell can be achieved in various, complementary ways. Keeping fire and smoke close-by at all times is crucial to limit olfactory dispersal, as we have seen before. Clay paints applied on the body and ancestral bone ornaments are equally effective in that respect. We know that Humanity always entails a specific effort; in this case, it primarily requires maintaining one's weight and smell.

Warding off wind-spirits or Absorbers is a constant preoccupation, but sometimes they are deliberately attracted. Obviously, this is a risky undertaking. It is only done by knowledgeable experts whom Pandya refers to as magicians.⁵² On particular occasions, the latter distance themselves from fire and smoke and refrain from wearing body paint and bone ornaments. Thus, they put themselves in a situation where they consciously allow the Absorbers to hunt them and—a tautology—the Winds to permeate them.

Anyone else would not survive this 'conjunction' with such non-Ongee entities but the magician is capable of returning alive and well. During his absence he visits the land referred to as 'beyond and faraway', which ordinary Ongee only get to see when they die. Sometimes magicians replicate the movements of the civet cat or those of the monitor lizard, both of whom have an augmented range of operation in comparison to other inhabitants of the forest (they are ground dwellers as well as excellent tree-climbers). Wildcats, lizards, winds, and magicians are indeed explicitly equated: 'They move quietly and rapidly and have the power to move both up and down and across water and land.'⁵³

The magician gradually becomes stronger, for each time one successfully survives the encounter with something dangerous, one accrues the same dangerous power.⁵⁴ In this manner he augments his ability to defend his community against violent winds. Actually, the former cannot be dissociated from the latter. Pandya writes that only the magician 'can control the storms by doing the same activities which may start the storm because he is like or is one of the spirits, whose anger and pleasure are experienced by the islanders as the arrival of storms and the stopping of storms.'⁵⁵ In my wording, he engages in a contrary effort; he is no longer Ongee but Absorber, he changed his Human shape for that of Wind. The magician is a shapeshifter, which implies that he is no longer Alive. That he visits the land 'beyond and faraway'—that is, the land of the dead—is not coincidental. During the journey, Humans transform into Monsters or Beasts. Absorbers and Winds are not so much spirits as Monsters: they are animate but Dead. Wildcats and Lizards are not so much wildlife as Beasts: they are animate but Dead too. Ultimately, what happens is a metamorphosis from the Living into the Dead. In Ongee animism, to protect or to cure is to die.

East Africa—Divinatory Techniques of the Uduk

In times of misfortune, Uduk people can fall back on a variety of experts such as ebony diviners and elephant masters, and each of these has a particular method to protect them from the ever threatening forces of the wild and the dead, the *arum*. Whatever the technique chosen, they always respond by 'sitting black' when they are struck by illness.⁵⁶ Patients remove their beads and decorations; they quite literally make their body black, for instance by smearing charcoal or pig dung on it. The use of red ochre (the ordinary anointment) is suspended. As such, they purposefully make themselves despicable—blackness indicates nastiness. In addition, they sing self-deprecating songs and are supposed to stay at home. That they should not wander far from the village and avoid places such as waterholes and rivers is because they are particularly vulnerable for attacks from the *arum*, the hooved or clawed creatures that reside in the bush. Illness is actually the consequence of an undesirable contact with such an 'alien spiritual presence', as Wendy James describes it.⁵⁷ The principal reason for sitting black,

then, is to rid the patient from that presence; the idea is that when an *arum* or Wild One sees such a nasty black body, he is appalled by it and leaves it alone. In this manner, patients recover. They are usually aided by a diviner who administers particular medicines. Notably, they are almost always treated with the very substance that is supposed to have made them sick.⁵⁸

The use of 'elephant medicine' is a case in point. That medicine, prepared from a specific root, is particularly relevant in the context of elephant hunting. I should mention that the ivory trade was flourishing along the Sudan-Ethiopian border until quite recently and that the Uduk were among those caught up in the elaborate networks that assured its supply, although they did not operate on a major scale themselves. Nowadays the herds have dwindled significantly as a result of civil war, but the elephant medicine cult is still practiced conspicuously.⁵⁹ What is it about?

The way in which the Uduk might summarize the business of Elephant Medicine is as follows: a man kills an elephant, or rather initiates the killing, for it requires many people to assist. He, and the community as a whole, obtain much meat, and also perhaps much wealth, from the killing. But there is a danger, from the *arum* of the elephant, which will strike him and also others if they are not given protective rites and treated with Elephant Medicine. This root from the bush is thought so powerful that it can itself make people ill. The main symptom is a skin disease, in its earlier stages indicated by rough itchy patches and flaking like an elephant's hide. The condition as defined by the Uduk may include what we call leprosy. Treatment is by an Elephant master, who acquired his practice either from having killed an elephant himself, or from the hand of a father, or a father's brother . . . who did kill an elephant in the past. . . . The details of the rites explicitly evoke the mythical struggle to overcome the wild and act out the conquest of the Elephant.⁶⁰

The conduct of those who speared an elephant and those who suffer from skin disease is identical. They both sit black. The spear hunter retires from the scene of the kill immediately; he keeps quiet and refuses all food. Neither he nor his assistants should consume their prey's meat; it is for unrelated people to do that. The hunters should not eat at all until a beer party is organized and they are treated with elephant medicine.⁶¹ The leprosy sufferer is isolated in exactly the same way, is subject to the same dietary restrictions, and covers himself with a charcoal mixture too. The seclusion may be followed up by a head-shaving rite during which patients are gradually but dramatically reintroduced to Uduk food, beer, fire, and everything that makes the hamlet a home.⁶² Finally, they anoint themselves again with red ochre.

These various procedures can be understood as metamorphoses from the Living into the Dead. Those who 'sit black' engage in a contrary effort; they are no longer Human, no longer Alive (the latter position is marked by the

colour red). Patients are not so much molested *by* Wild Ones, as transforming *into* such creatures of the bush. They lose their Uduk shape. Those who suffer from leprosy turn into Elephants; Humans become Beasts. Likewise, those who spear elephants have lost their Humanity. As long as they remain in seclusion, they take the position of hoofed, clawed, or tusked creatures from the bush, that is, of Wild Ones. Patients and hunters are Monsters or Beasts. The exact label is not so important; what ultimately matters is that they are both animate but Dead. In other words, they are at the same time equivalent and incommensurable with Uduk. However, everything indicates that the final aim is to regain one's Humanity and to become Alive again. The elephant master is primarily an expert shape-shifter; he has previous experience of transforming into an Elephant and changing back into an Uduk. He realizes that Life, just like Humanity, is something that requires a continuous effort—it is 'fabricated'; hence the emphasis on reintroducing all things 'of the home'. Guided by the elephant master, the patient or the hunter is made Alive again.

When Maa-warriors Raid Cattle, Shiver, Shake, Dance

In the world of Maa pastoralists the age-group of the *moran*—what I imperfectly translate as 'warriors'—is fairly neatly segregated from the rest of society. Samburu warriors reside in transient thorny enclosures, away from the settlements inhabited by elders, women, and children. Likewise, Maasai warriors spend most of their time in the bush, where they establish their own camps. Generally speaking, the conduct of the *moran* is very distinct from that of ordinary Maa. Paul Spencer remarks: 'In their values and behaviour they tend towards a form of delinquency which contrasts with the ideals of peace and harmony expressed by the elders'.⁶³ They also distinguish themselves in their dietary habits. Warriors should only drink milk in the company of other warriors (whereas elders 'drink milk alone') and they should avoid meat seen by married women.⁶⁴ Their sheer appearance is obviously different too: 'their long braided hair covered in red ochre, their decorative bead ornaments, and their colourful loin cloths are a sharp contrast to the relatively drab and unobtrusive apparel of boys and elders'.⁶⁵ Traditionally, peaceful husbandry controlled by the elders was complemented by cattle-raiding undertaken by the warriors. Especially in times of adversity, when the herds had dwindled because of drought or disease, the predatory mode prevailed.⁶⁶ Although raiding is outlawed at present, the military function of the *moran* is far from obsolete. As Bilinda Straight underlines, they continue 'to protect herds from neighbouring groups like the Turkana and Somali and from predators like lions'.⁶⁷ What is more, stock theft remains a laudable endeavour. At least until the 1960s, girls would only pay attention to a *moran* if he had stolen at least one cow.⁶⁸

A remarkable characteristic of warriors is their 'angry' disposition and the associated propensity to shake. Anger is seen as an indication of the fighting

prowess and the assertiveness expected of any *morán*. Shivering in anger is in fact a highly institutionalised form of display; it is envisaged as an auspicious prelude to cattle raiding or warfare. In the words of Spencer:

One of their privileges when angry is to 'shiver' . . . If the intensity of a bout of anger increases beyond a certain point, a warrior may shiver more violently and lose consciousness as he starts to 'shake' . . . At this point, others will hold him to prevent him hurting himself or anyone else. . . . A shaking warrior breathes in audible gasps, as if straining to release some inner pressure, his face wet with tears, mucus and froth from his mouth.⁶⁹

When Maa people describe such convulsive fits of shaking, they emphasize a certain kind of 'breathlessness'. In fact, the Maasai term for 'to be angry' is a reflexive form of 'to suffocate'.⁷⁰ Such shaking is especially prevalent during dances at specific age-set ceremonies, where shivering may be seen to spread 'almost like an epidemic' among the *morán*.⁷¹ Spencer specifies: 'During the dances of display in particular, where the *morán* say they are angry, their chorus is a rhythmic growl—almost a suspended bellow not unlike a bull's'.⁷² Further onwards, we will see that it is not by chance that such age-set ceremonies always revolve around the sacrifice of cattle or more precisely its suffocation, for bloodshed is rigorously avoided at such rituals. Neither is it a coincidence that warrior dances and 'real' warfare overlap in many respects. On both occasions, the *morán* appear in full regalia, wearing black calfskin capes, spears, shields, and headdresses made from ostrich feathers or lion manes. On both occasions, they paint their bodies with red ochre, white chalk, and/or black ash. Dances and raids are also the occasions where they utter their distinctive grunts and yelps. Just as dancers are guided by so-called fire-stick patrons who solemnly kindle a fire to inaugurate or 'cut off' a new age-set, raiders are assisted by senior diviners who advise them on battle strategies.

New light is shed on the foregoing if we accept that warriors are not Human. Strictly speaking, they are neither Maasai nor Samburu. I would argue that *morán* are Monsters or Beasts; they are animate but Dead. Their predatory conduct, their colourful appearance, and their peculiar dietary habits amount to a contrary effort. Those who shiver and shake in anger are no longer Alive but Dead; they have changed shape. Becoming 'breathless' implies a transformation from Humans into Bulls. During the age-set ceremony they have died; that is, they assume exactly the same position as the ox that is suffocated. The ox is usually intoxicated with mead beforehand, and it should not surprise us that the warriors themselves also consume great quantities of that honey brew on such occasions. The appearance of honey is not at all random. We have already seen that it is the favourite food item of the 'Dorobo', those bush-dwelling hunters whom pastoralist upholders so despise. To drink mead, I suggest, is to become as Monstrous as the

Dorobo. Both raiding and dancing are premised on metamorphosis. Those who don specific headdresses are not Maasai or Samburu but Ostriches or Lions. Grunting and yelping indicates that one is no longer Pastoralist but Predator. Using spears and shields marks a shift from Humanity into Monstrosity, from Life into Death. Further onwards, I will show that the metamorphosis itself is primarily envisaged as an act of 'cutting'.

FROM THE LIVING INTO THE DEAD

Adultery among the Chachi, epidemics in Amazonia, Lakota puberty rites, headaches in northern Japan, loss of weight on the Andaman Islands, Uduk treatment of skin diseases: all of this and much else can fruitfully be understood in terms of metamorphosis. While at first sight entirely unrelated, this chapter has shown that these issues and the various ways they are dealt with have at least one fundamental feature in common. Adversity always involves a discontinuity, a change of shapes. The pattern that recurs time and again is that of a shift from the Living into the Dead. To be sure, this insight is prefigured in earlier works. In his classic book on shamanism, Mircea Eliade already stated that 'as a rule, the shaman "dies"',⁷³ To discard such a contention as over-generalising would be ill-advised. The only thing one could criticise Eliade for is that he is too cautious, because he still uses inverted commas: he writes 'dies' and not dies. That is, he thinks that whereas the shaman is 'symbolically' dead, he is 'really' alive. However, shape-shifting is always a matter of either/or: one is either Dead or Alive. Within animism, there is no doubt that both positions are entirely equivalent; they arise from specific (if contrary) efforts. As such, Death is not more symbolical or less real than Life. We are dealing with shapes and these are by definition made or fabricated.

In their *Outline of a General Theory of Magic* Hubert and Mauss pre-saged this, when they noted that '... *la magie est essentiellement un art de faire* ...'⁷⁴ Paraphrasing them, I would say that magic is essentially doing Dead. With remarkable consistency, animists all over the world conceive of illness and other forms of misfortune as losing one's Human shape. Those who are struck transform into Monsters or Beasts (cf. Descola [2005: 393]). In any case, what matters is that their Life is suspended and that they end up Dead, at least temporarily. That they may still breathe, talk, and walk is not a contradiction. As we have seen, being simultaneously Dead and animate is precisely one of the foremost characteristics of Monsters and Beasts alike. With similar consistency, shamans, magicians, medicine men, and all those with specific expertise on dealing with adversity voluntarily cast off their Humanity; they deliberately engage in a contrary effort. Thus they assume the position of Monsters or Beasts, just like those they intend to help.⁷⁵

5 Death

Ritual and the Suspension of Life

[The] dead have been ousted by geography from any earthly district, and the regions of heaven and hell are more and more spiritualized out of definite locality into vague expressions of future happiness and misery.

—Edward B. Tylor (2010b[1871]: 92)

By now it has transpired that the great divide between metamorphosis and evolution, between animism and biology, is not an incontrovertible, eternal truth but merely an aspect of a widespread but at the same time parochial framework of thought—the modern Western cosmology. In this chapter, I continue our investigation into metamorphosis and show that envisaging the living world as discontinuous is not any less plausible than the gradual-change doctrine of evolutionary theory. This is illustrated by examining the way in which so-called indigenous people deal with death and by exploring the intricate link between funerary rituals and metamorphosis.

ANIMISM AND THE OMNIPRESENCE OF DEATH

When regimes of animism were dominant, death was much more tangibly present than commonly imagined. But with the advent of the Western cosmology its scope has diminished significantly; the modern sciences have ousted it from ‘any earthly district’, as Tylor noted with his usual perspicuity. In this respect, it is useful to say a few words on the achievements of another pioneering anthropologist, Robert Hertz, who wrote an unsurpassed essay on death: *La représentation collective de la mort*. I say ‘unsurpassed’ because of its refreshing panache: he tackled the theme of death—in general—by means of worldwide comparison. At present, few anthropologists would endorse this kind of sweeping endeavour, because it is seen as unwarranted not to say pretentious. One of their principal objections is that such generalising efforts fail to grasp the complexities of specific cultural and historical contexts adequately. The implicit assumption is that one may be able to say something sensible about death in one particular ethnographic region but venturing beyond that inevitably leads to disappointment, i.e. overly superficial insights and the reaffirmation of commonplaces. The present chapter can be read as a reaction against this attitude of *défaitisme*. Of course, I do not mean by this that everything in Hertz’s essay must be taken at face value. But from the comfortable

position of hindsight (the essay was first published in 1907) it is all too easy to pick on its shortcomings. Rather, we should appreciate its overall ambition. I will show that Hertz's project is valid and appropriate, perhaps even more so today, in an era when academic over-specialisation has become all but the norm.

The key issue is that the scope of death used to be much more encompassing. Far from being confined to the very end, when somebody passes away, it cropped up at various moments during the life course. Such occasions where death came to the foreground were not entirely random; they usually coincided with so-called rites of passage. In the essay, Hertz suggests that rites of birth, initiation, and marriage are not fundamentally different from mortuary rituals.¹ He insightfully argues that decease is only a particular instance of a more general phenomenon of death. It is worth quoting him more fully:

Death should not be compared only with initiation [where the initiates temporarily die]. The close relationship that exists between funeral rites and rites of birth or marriage has often been noticed. Like death, these two events give rise to an important ceremony in which a certain anxiety is mixed with the joy. . . . The body of the new-born child is no less sacred than the corpse. The veil of the bride and that of the widow are of different colours, but they nonetheless have the same function, which is to isolate and set apart a redoubtable person. Thus death is not originally conceived as a unique event without any analogue. [. . . Each] promotion of the individual implies the passage from one group to another: an exclusion, i.e. a death, and a new integration, i.e. a rebirth.²

In essence, Hertz hints that all those who participate in these various rites of passage temporarily die. Note that he does not use inverted commas. Whereas his exact wording and his choice of examples is to some extent questionable (but remember that he wrote before World War I), he convincingly illustrates that death is or—at least—used to be much more palpably present than one may imagine. It is, in his own words, 'not a singular event occurring only once in the history of an individual'.³ What is more, the essay indicates that death is not just a central element of specific rituals but also an irreducible aspect of everyday life. Within an animistic framework the dead can appear at all times, in the most diverse guises and in the most diverse situations. Whereas this observation is a bit of a truism, it is nevertheless worthwhile to illustrate it in some detail; I will again draw on my own research.

Chachi people are frequently plagued by all sorts of ghosts (*ujmu*). When I first arrived in the village that would become my main field site, the wife of one of the villagers had recently died. As her ghost was still wandering around, the widower and his children were forced to abandon their

house and moved in with relatives next-door. The deceased, I was told, could sometimes be seen on the river at night, holding a candle and passing by in a canoe. When some of the villagers became ill this was blamed on the ghost. Yet, she was not deemed inherently malicious. To the contrary, people were convinced that she lingered around because she missed her children very much. Still, she caused considerable misfortune because, as one elderly villager explained, ‘with *ujmu*, everything happens the other way round.’ He specified: ‘If the ghost likes you, you become sick. When it hates you, strangely enough, nothing happens, you are safe.’ In other words, people and ghosts have opposing perspectives: what the latter perceive as an expression of affection, the former experience as greatly damaging. Ghosts of the drowned (*pillujmu*) are revenants that wander in the river, especially at spots where there are eddies or counter-currents. In these places, people sometimes put ladders as a protective measure. ‘Wouldn’t that make it easier for them to climb out of the river?’ I once naively asked. Not quite, it emerged. The same villager told me that such ghosts always advance backwards; if they tried to reach land, they would fall through the holes of the ladder. The living and the drowned, *chachi* and *pillujmu*, have opposing perspectives: what facilitates climbing out of the river for the former is a hindrance for the latter. During my own fieldwork, numerous canoeists and swimmers reported being attacked by such river ghosts. On one occasion such an incident alarmed the entire village and we all slept together in the same house, guns and machetes within easy reach.

Other avatars of death are referred to as *fayu ujmu*, brain-sucking ghosts, and as *paapiñi*, slow-moving dragons. Both are dangerous, especially for hunters. When one of my hosts was still a young girl and her father returned from the forest, she and her siblings had the habit of going through his hair. This was to check whether he had been bitten by a brain-sucker, which would have left a hole in his skull. Such ghosts look human, but have the beak of a toucan. At the back of their head there is a hole, through which their wives feed them *masato*, a drink prepared from mashed plantains. They prey on people’s brains and their victims become brain-suckers themselves. When my host groped her father’s cranium, this was to make sure that he had not turned into such a ghost. Up until today hunters avoid certain places in the hills where the ground is rugged, for giant underground dragons with multiple heads lurk there. Among their most remarkable properties is a capacity to slow everything down. Various senior hunters assured me they had personally experienced this: the peccaries or deer they were pursuing suddenly decelerated. Then, they began losing speed themselves. Everything went into slow-motion. At that point they realized they had to escape, for those who come too close to the dragon get paralysed. If the hunter comes to a complete standstill, he dies. When the brother of one of my hosts was struck by paralysis, for instance, the shamans attributed that to an unpropitious encounter with such a slow-moving dragon. Some of my interlocutors insisted that the victim becomes a dragon himself.

The problem is not that anthropologists fail to recognise such manifestations of death. To be fair, their monographs usually describe them very well. The veritable problem—as Philippe Descola and various others have pointed out time and again—lies in the way in which they evacuate them to the domain of the symbolic, the metaphoric, or the imagined. Metamorphoses do not really take place; initiates do not truly die during a rite of passage; these various manifestations should not be taken literally. Against the better advice of the people they study, anthropologists under the sway of the modern cosmology insist on splitting death in two, so to speak. The move is as contrived as it is inelegant. On the one hand, they equate death to the inert: that is what they refer to as ‘real’ death. When the dead appear to be animate, on the other hand, we are suddenly talking about ‘symbolic’ death. Sometimes the matter is resolved even more slyly, simply by adding inverted commas. Whereas those at the very end of their life die, those who participate in a rite of passage ‘die’. The first death is deemed serious, the second less so. The fact that animistic peoples rarely—if ever—make any distinction between such gradations of seriousness is dismissed as a trifle inconvenience. Obviously, this peculiar configuration has contributed to what one could describe as the minimisation of death. In all areas where the modern Western cosmology has been adopted, the scope of death has been reduced to its absolute minimum, namely decease. Ghosts, dragons, and temporary deaths have been made redundant.

Clearly, a comprehensive study of death in regimes of animism would require a great deal more than just an examination of what happens when somebody passes away. Even so, I have chosen to limit the present chapter mostly to an investigation of mortuary rituals and funerary practices. As such, it is a great deal less encompassing than what Hertz himself had in mind.

TO MOURN IS TO METAMORPHOSE INTO A MONSTER OR BEAST

Chachi funerals involve a bewildering variety of ‘games’ that are only played in that particular context. Staging such mortuary games in everyday circumstances is strictly forbidden; this would be very dangerous according to my Chachi interlocutors, causing illness or even death. In what follows, I describe what happened at the funeral of an elder who died in November 2003. At night, a wake took place in the dead man’s house; it was attended by more than one hundred relatives and friends. What particularly struck me was the elated mood: there was a lot of laughter and a great deal of shouting. Most of the games played during the wake involved monetary transactions and, more precisely, the circulation of coins made of plantain. The relatives chose a ‘leader of the wake’ (*velui uñi*), whose task was to coordinate the games and to incite idle onlookers to join in by tickling them. If one laughed, one was obliged to play. Another of his responsibilities was to give fines (payable in plantain coins) to those who played

badly, or even to whip them. The close relatives of the deceased expected that the players enjoy themselves and encouraged the festive mood by distributing rum and cigarettes lavishly. In fact, such items were not gifts but commodities purchased with slices of plantain. Those participating in the games 'buy' whereas close relatives of the deceased 'sell'. The plantain coins accumulated through these exchanges were subsequently deposited inside the coffin.

For the opening game, the players sat behind each other in a circle around a big heap of plantain coins. A blackened piece of plantain had been carved with a face on one side. It was thrown like a dice, and players received coins when it dropped face upwards. Players who let the piece fall face down got slapped on their hands by the next player. The game finished with a few rounds of castigation. Player A slaps as hard as he can the hands of Player B, his neighbour. Player B returns Player A's slapping before turning to Player C, and so on. At a signal from the leader of the wake, the players stood up and formed a new circle. Keeping close to each other and holding on tight to each other's elbows, they were now the 'fence'. They hopped and moved around one player, the 'cow'. In this relatively rough game, the cow furiously stormed, rammed, and battered the fence. The cow was supposed to escape, while remaining impervious to the shower of insults coming from the fence. When the game was over, all the players joined in a chorus. They sang esoteric chants that contain all sorts of strange, non-vernacular expressions, which are endlessly repeated. This was followed by several whipping games. They all involved a whip made out of a plaited piece of cloth that used to belong to the deceased. For example, the players would form a circle and start lashing each other's bottoms. Each beating was accompanied by a stirring scream: '*Gorwal*' They always chastised the one from whom they had received the whip. Then, they passed it on by putting it on the next man's shoulder and were beaten themselves. The whip went round the circle several times. According to my own estimations, every participant had suffered at least forty-two whippings by the end of the game.

By midnight, most participants were drunk. The next game involved one player who was the 'chicken', one who was the 'jaguar', and a long row of players who were 'chicks'. The chicks positioned themselves behind the chicken, who was supposed to protect them from the jaguar. As the row of chicks progressed swaying and swinging, the players uttered various kinds of esoteric phrases. Suddenly, the jaguar would dart forward, trying to catch one of the chicks. When he had hunted them all down, the chicks were dramatically 'weighed' (they were obliged to do a somersault). The jaguar then sold the chicks and was paid a great amount of plantain coins. But soon there was great commotion: his money had been stolen! At this moment, two new players rushed in: a 'policeman' on his 'horse'. They tracked down the 'thief' and arrested him. The recovered money was shared out among the players, who used it to buy the various items needed

for the remainder of the games. Later, a fish-catching contest was organized (a species known as *pityashu* or, in local Spanish, as *barbudo*). The house became a 'river', and all those present 'fish'. Some players, the 'fishermen', threw a line out to the fish. Occasionally they hit one, but sometimes the fish sent the line back, rolling of laughter: the fish escaped from the hook! Each time a fisherman caught a fish, it was 'weighed' and 'sold'.

At one point, someone climbed on a ridge beam to attach a long piece of white cloth, while a player underneath pulled the cloth in the opposite direction. The man in the elevated position became a 'macaw', shouting 'Awaaa, awaaa!' The man underneath became a 'royal palm'. Other players impersonated a herd of white-lipped peccaries. They were pursued by a 'hunter', as well as by a pack of 'ferocious dogs'. Having spotted the hunter and the dogs, the white-lipped peccaries fled in a panic, jumping over those who had already fallen asleep. Eventually, the hunter 'shot' the peccaries by throwing little wooden sticks. The macaw was also shot and fell from the royal palm. Finally, the hunter 'sold' his game, thus obtaining a great amount of plantain money.

The last game evoked the harvesting of manioc. The players lined up in a long file; they had become 'manioc roots'. Each player sat between the knees of the player behind and held the trunk of the one in front, except one—the 'harvester'. The latter's job consisted in pulling out the manioc roots. First, the 'field' (the house floor) needed to be cleared. So the harvester, armed with a 'machete' (a wooden stick) tapped on the floor right next to the row of roots. He also 'smoked out the wasps' by walking along the row again, armed this time with a fire-lit dried palm leaf. Then, he tried to pull the roots out, one by one. The roots resisted; they clung to each other, each time sinking a bit deeper into the ground. But the harvester ended up triumphant. By having them do a backward somersault, he 'weighed' the roots. Finally, the latter were hauled away and thrown on a heap. The harvester 'sold' them in exchange for plantain coins.

At sunrise, most of those who had attended the wake looked for their canoes and returned home, while close kin and friends transported the corpse to the ceremonial centre, also known as the 'village of the dead' or literally 'where the dead are together', *pebulu* (the prefix is derived from the verb *penu*, 'to die'). These ceremonial centres—only used on specific occasions such as weddings and funerals—consist of a church and various communal houses. No one lives there, and they remain empty for most of the year. Such centres are usually built along parts of the river where the physical properties of the landscape are reversed, for instance where there are whirlpools. In these places, the water flow is obstructed, and the current flows the other way around. Ordinary houses, by contrast, are always built along stretches of the river where the water flows straightforwardly. Made out of bamboo, the coffin was referred to as the 'canoe of the ghost' (*ujkungule*). Just like the living, one of my interlocutors explained, the dead have all kinds of needs, and they travel by canoe. They have to dress, to

work, and to eat. This is why plantain coins were deposited in the coffin, as well as real money. This is also why a whole range of personal belongings were put inside, such as clothes, fishing hooks, and axes. Once in a while, some of the mourners went to the church to light candles or to utter esoteric incantations (*utya*, *oraciones*). Finally, the mourners shared a conspicuously uncharacteristic meal (*mena'finu*) of unsalted manioc with pineapple and all sorts of sweet condiments. A plate of this food was also placed inside the coffin. A grave was dug underneath one of the communal houses, a task which required the consumption of great quantities of rum. Eventually, the corpse was buried.

The funeral obviously involves various metamorphoses. Therefore it is somewhat misleading to speak of 'games'; we are not dealing with players doing merely 'as if'. To succumb to using quotation marks, as I just did, is actually a cop-out. Strictly speaking, the funeral is an occasion where Humans shift into Monsters and Beasts, the Living turn into the Dead. Not just the corpse, but all those present at the wake are no longer Alive. The mourners consistently engage in some kind of contrary effort. Earning money, exchanging it, weighing, buying, and selling are envisaged as the quintessential behaviour of white businessmen in cities, not of Chachi. Whipping and castigating typify the conduct of cruel hacienda-bosses and military officers of the colonial epoch, not that of Chachi. Acting as a policeman, fishing with lines and harvesting manioc are associated with Hispanics and/or non-Chachi Indians (in contrast, proper Chachi are passionate about fishing with spears and harvesting plantains). Those who engage in such activities are Monsters rather than Humans. Alternatively, the mourners change into Beasts. More particularly, they change shape into Cows, Chickens, Jaguars, Horses, Fish, Macaws, Dogs, or White-Lipped Peccaries. Trying to figure out whether they are Monsters or Beasts does not really matter: what counts is that both are simultaneously animate and Dead.

Tobacco and rum play a crucial role in facilitating this metamorphosis from Life into Death. All those participating in the funeral consume large amounts of both, thus engaging in contrary efforts. In ordinary circumstances, Chachi usually neither drink nor smoke. The frequent usage of archaic expressions and incomprehensible phrases can also be grasped as a non-Human effort. Alcohol, tobacco, and esoteric utterances set in motion what one could describe as a carousel of perspectives. What is sad from the viewpoint of the Living, is perceived as enjoyable by the Dead; the departing of a kinsman is viewed as a sequence of games. Extreme sorrow from the perspective of the Living is utmost fun from that of the Dead—hence the emphasis on laughter and joking during the wake. In fact, shifts in perspective are rife during the entire funeral. What the Living perceive as a house full of people becomes a river full of fish from the viewpoint of the Dead. What the Living view as people sitting on a wooden floor is for the Dead a field of manioc. What the Living identify as a man climbing

on a ridge beam, the Dead see as a macaw in a palm tree. Depending on the viewpoint, we are dealing with a very sinkable bamboo coffin or a wooden canoe; what is pervious from a Human perspective is waterproof from that of the Deceased. Whereas Chachi habitually eat plantains and salted foodstuffs, the mourners eat unsalted manioc and all sorts of sweet items. What the Living view as inedible 'anti-food', the Dead perceive as an appropriate meal.

In sum, when death occurs the mourners are supposed to adopt a similar position as the deceased. But in how far is that also the case more widely?

HOW ANIMISTS DEAL WITH DEATH

Amazonia—Why Wari' Funerals are Watery

In my discussion of Wari' shamans I have already indicated that death is envisaged as metamorphosis. Usually, it is the result of an accidental confusion of perspectives. For example, Wari' forest dwellers fear predatory peccaries, who view them as game rather than as human beings. Those who fall victim turn into members of the attacking species. In Wari' animism, being devoured by such a peccary is not an instance of absolute annihilation but rather one of transformation. From the aggressor's viewpoint the human population augments, because peccaries view themselves as humans. When somebody is killed by an enemy, the same principle applies:

Such a metamorphosis also takes place when a Wari' dies at the hands of an enemy. The victim gets the same body as his opponents—if they are Whites, he will find himself in a white man's body, complete with clothes and all. From then onwards, he will live together with them, as a member of their group.⁴

The moribund are said to travel downstream, to the underwater world where the dead dwell. Upon their arrival, they are offered maize beer. The idea that always recurs is that if they accept to drink, they die; if they refuse, they heal and return to the world of the living. These various, at first sight unrelated destinations of the deceased actually have a great deal in common. As we have seen before, the foremost peculiarity of Whites is that they reside near big rivers; their territory overlaps with the aquatic world of the dead. Underwater creatures such as the *orotapan* are reputed for the destruction of Wari' houses and their taste for human flesh, just like white enemies. Aparecida Vilaça perceptively suggests that 'Whites and the dead are equivalent'.⁵ What is more, peccaries (both preferred prey and notorious predators) also have their abodes underwater according to Wari' lore. In marked contrast to the Wari' world, the realm of their opponents (game or enemies) is systematically characterized by an over-abundance of water.

I suggest that acting 'watery' (i.e. living near streams) and drinking maize beer are contrary efforts. Those who engage in it are not Alive but Dead. What takes place is a change of shape from Wari' to Peccary, from Wari' to White or, more generally, from Humans to aquatic Beasts or Monsters. What happens at funerals confirms this interpretation.

When somebody dies, the relatives gather and ceaselessly wail in a high, sorrowful tone. Grieving kin usually embrace the corpse tenaciously, until the moment it is disposed of. Sometimes they quite literally join their loved one in death:

Since Wari' equate any loss of consciousness with death, fainting is a form of dying . . . and in one common funeral practice, adult mourners 'die' by lying on top of one another in stacks as high as four or five people, with the corpse on top of the pile.⁶

At pre-contact funerals a roasting rack was built in the men's house. Firewood bundles were decorated with red annatto paint and feathers of vultures (as carrion eaters obviously associated with death) and of scarlet macaws (associated with the ancestors that dwell underwater). The mourners adorned themselves similarly, with annatto and feathers.⁷ Habitually, there was a great deal of singing, dancing, and crying. The corpse was eventually cut into pieces which were wrapped in leaves to be roasted. 'In many respects', Beth Conklin notes, 'the manner in which Wari' dismembered human corpses was similar to the way they butcher game'.⁸ A fire would be lit and when the body parts were well roasted they were removed from the rack and placed on mats. A senior kinsman would then separate the flesh from the bones and offer it to those attending the funeral, but not to close relatives. By dawn, all the flesh would be consumed. The bones were disposed of and the personal possessions of the deceased were destroyed. After the funeral, the dead were only referred to in general terms, for instance as 'white-lipped peccaries'.⁹ How to make sense of all this?

Wailing, crying, singing, adorning oneself with feathers, and—most obviously—eating the body of the deceased are contrary efforts. The mourners themselves are no longer Alive but Dead. To say that their death is merely 'symbolical' would be misleading; their explanation about lying on top of one another must be taken in its most literal sense. Fainting is in no way a lesser contrary effort than what anthropologists would refer to as 'true' or 'real' death. The mourners are shape-shifters, not unlike the deceased. During the funeral, they are no longer Wari' but Vultures or Macaws. In broader terms, they are no longer Human but some kind of underwater Beast. That they are obviously animate does not make them less Dead. The deceased themselves adopt the position of game; they are no longer Humans but White-Lipped Peccaries. Not surprisingly, the latter are conceived of as underwater Beasts, too. In sum, funerals are metamorphoses whereby Life is temporarily suspended; the ordinary Wari' world switches

into the watery world of the Dead. There is no absolute difference between mourning and dying; both efforts are eminently Monstrous or Beast-like.

Mourners as Baldheads, Beer drinkers as Whipping Shadows

In Matis animism, things progress from downstream to upstream.¹⁰ Older siblings are always born 'downriver' from their cadets, as if everything moves towards the headwaters. Only the dead, whose ashes are sometimes thrown in the river, follow the current to re-join the ancestors. The living, by contrast, must always orient themselves in the opposite direction. When bathing in the river, they always immerse themselves facing the current. The deceased are said to have no ornaments, at least not proper ones.¹¹ If somebody dies the mourners shave their hair and reduce their ornamentation; they temporarily become akin to the Baldheads (*maru*), who are precisely characterised by their lack of hair and the absence of ornaments.¹² The drastic nature of these measures cannot be overstated. I have already underlined that Matis ornaments are not mere cosmetics that can be removed at will. Philippe Erikson incessantly emphasizes that beads and other adornments are not merely 'added onto' the body, but are truly inseparable from it, rather like nails or teeth.¹³ As such, mourning is a form of self-mutilation. I conclude with a few words on the actual sites where the deceased are supposed to reside. Whereas they are generally believed to dwell faraway downstream, they are also present in specific places more nearby. As Baldheads, they haunt clearings in the forest where the wind has toppled trees. Alternatively, they are envisaged as Whipping Shadows (*mariwin*), dwelling in ancient orchards that people occasionally visit to harvest maize or peach palm fruits.

Going with the current, I propose, must be understood as a contrary effort. Going against the current is an essential prerequisite to count as Matis; it is one of the foremost Human efforts. In other words, to face the current is to be Alive whereas to drift along is tantamount to Death. When mourners remove their ornaments and shave their hair they are no longer Matis but Baldheads, no longer Humans but Monsters, no longer Alive but Dead. During the funerary practices, one is supposed to occupy the same position as one's deceased relative. A similar metamorphosis is likely to befall those who visit ancient orchards. It is no coincidence that the food items harvested there are never eaten in ordinary circumstances. They are only used to make beer on ritual occasions where Matis transform into Whipping Shadows, as we shall see. Drinking beer is a contrary effort, too; to consume such a fermented substance is to die. More generally, I would suggest that only the Matis and their pets are Alive. Everything and everybody that falls outside the Human perimeter (in practice all that is situated beyond the gardens-in-cultivation that surround the settlement) is perhaps animate but also unambiguously Dead. One only finds Monsters and Beasts over there, as confirmed by the stories of those who hazarded long journeys downstream.

North America—Grave Plundering in Navajo Territory

In line with Amazonian animism, the Navajo used to obliterate anything that has to do with death. The deceased were usually buried together with their most valued possessions: clothes, silver jewellery, precious stones, and their favourite horse.¹⁴ Notably, all these possessions had to be destructed. Gladys A. Reichard observes: 'If [the deceased] had horses, they club the horses to death . . . His best saddle, saddle blanket, bridle—on all these they hammer [to destroy them]. Only in this way will they be of use to the deceased they say'.¹⁵ Mourners used to blacken themselves with soot at the vigil. Afterwards they would take a sweat bath, during which they cleaned themselves thoroughly with pollen and extracts from yucca and cactus.¹⁶ In ordinary circumstances, gravesites were avoided at all cost. The mourning relatives would tear down the lodge of the departed, move away, and live somewhere else. Whereas this strategy of annihilation is not followed so strictly anymore—the *Navajo Times* nowadays publishes obituaries of prominent Navajos—many age-old conceptions do prevail.¹⁷ The fear of nefarious witches who plunder graves is still widespread. These witches are said to lurk in canyons and caves; they are referred to as skin-walkers because they clothe themselves in the hides and furs of wild predators.¹⁸ The most common colloquial term for 'witch' literally means 'wolf', but they can adopt all kinds of appearances by changing skins.¹⁹

At night they run around on all fours in skins of wolf or coyotes or bear. They paint their face yellow on chin, black on nose, blue on the mouth, white on the forehead. Except for the beads and skins and paint they are naked. . . . [Those witches] take any kind of hide. They take the bones out and leave the claws. They put sticks in the legs to move the skin. With strings they move the ears of the hide up and down.²⁰

Such witches are also associated with neighbouring Hopi, Zuni, or Mexicans, and especially with exceedingly rich people. The latter are always suspected of having obtained their wealth by stealing valuable grave goods. Although reluctant to speak about such matters, Navajo people do occasionally report encounters with such grave plunderers. Up until today, they are held responsible for all kinds of misfortune and unpropitious occurrences such as car accidents. The core issue is that witches are primarily recognized in terms of their conspicuously inappropriate behaviour, antithetical to that of any decent Navajo. For instance, they are suspected of committing incest, of killing their own siblings, and of indulging in necrophilia. In the words of Clyde Kluckhohn: '[Witches are attributed] all the stigmata of evil: incest, nakedness, cruelty, bestiality, and other kinds of forbidden knowledge and actions.'²¹

In the literature, that wicked attitude is referred to as the witchery way. I suggest that it must be understood as a contrary effort. It stands in

contrast to the notions of industriousness and generosity that are so central in Navajo conceptions of Humanity, as we have seen previously.²² Witches are anti-Navajo or non-Humans. As such, they are not just a little bit different from Navajo but radically incommensurable. If the latter are Alive, the former are necessarily Dead. Hence their proclivity to change shape into all sorts of Beasts and Monsters: as Wolves, Coyotes, or Mexicans, they may be animate but they are not Alive. It is not by chance that Navajo people underline that witches pertain to the realm of death time and again. The argument can be pushed further: not just witches are Monsters, but mourners, too. Their destructive demeanour during the funerary rites is also a contrary effort. Their blackness indicates that they are no longer Alive but Dead. If this is correct, the vigil must be understood as an instance of collective shape-shifting whereby all those present take up the same position as the deceased. The concluding sweat bath is a metamorphic instrument which brings the mourners back to Humanity. Cleansing oneself with pollen is returning to Life. Note that everything mentioned is underpinned by a latent perspectivism. What is destroyed from the viewpoint of the Living becomes useable from that of the Dead. What Monsters perceive as laudable is despicable from a Human perspective. This suggests that witches and mourners do not conceive themselves as Monsters but as Humans. In other words, both Life and Death are positional qualities.

The Morbidity of Sioux Clowns

Previously I mentioned the *heyoka*, Clowns who had visions of Thunderbirds and who would greatly amuse Lakota people with their absurdities, their obscenities, and their outlandish masks. What is interesting for my purposes here is that Clowns also had an obvious link with death. They often painted their faces black and were expected to give away all their belongings, just as mourners do, and had a close relationship with cedars, the tree that usually marks somebody's grave. Not coincidentally, people would seek shelter under such cedar trees when there was a thunderstorm. As spring approached and the first thunders arrived, Lakota people would organize what ethnographers refer to as '*heyoka* ceremonies' or 'kettle dances'.²³ On such occasions puppies were strangled, butchered, and boiled in kettles. Clowns who, as usual, spoke 'backwards' and behaved in a conspicuously 'opposite' way would eventually plunge their arm into the boiling water and retrieve chunks of dog meat. They often provoked great hilarity by throwing the meat towards the onlookers. The Clowns would also scoop up handfuls of boiling water and hurl it over each other's backs, all the while complaining that the water was too cold (they did not burn themselves because they would have rubbed their skin with a special ointment from a particular prairie wildflower).²⁴ However, all this was not merely gratuitous amusement. Kingsley M. Bray insists: 'Failure to perform these duties would result in certain death by lightning'.²⁵ But there is more.

In fact, Clowns were also formidable warriors who could draw thunder, lightning, storm, and death upon their adversaries in a quite literal sense. The unpredictability of their movement was a central quality, which they emulated from the Thunderbird and its avatars:

The jagged line of lightning; the sudden fall and climb of a dragonfly; the tipped swoop of a flock of swallows ahead of thunder; the squeaking night flight of bats; a horse's sudden run or the awesome drop to the kill of [. . .] the red-tailed hawk—all were characterized by suddenness, unpredictability. [Lakotas recognized this erratic motion] as a property of the [Thunderbird and its] messengers.²⁶

In times of combat Clowns wiped their ponies with sprigs of sage and threw dust over their rump, which they would rub into the animals' skin in streaky lines. They would also paint their own bodies with the motif of hailstones and lightning streaks; they might adorn themselves with feathers of hawks or eagles (the Thunderbird's principal representatives), but for the rest fought naked. That is in any case how Crazy Horse, perhaps the most famous Sioux warrior, typically went into battle in the 19th century. Ray describes his military technique as follows:

Crazy Horse worked hard to assimilate Thunder's message, fronting charges to act as the leading edge of an unpredictable lightning strike. Against the Crows, and later in such large-scale clashes with the Americans as the Battle of Rosebud, he led long oblique lines of charging horsemen that rippled across the terrain like lightning.²⁷

During an attack, warriors such as Crazy Horse blew eagle bone whistles; together with their hailstone body paint this truly made them 'spotted eagles', as Lakotas like to call these miniature Thunderbirds. It is not surprising, then, that eagles also played a prominent role when somebody died. Just like Thunderbirds and their avatars, the recently deceased were deemed capricious and unpredictable.²⁸ Lakotas organized so-called ghost-keeping ceremonies where the close relatives of the deceased would demonstrate extreme generosity, giving away their most valuable possessions (just as Clowns do).²⁹ For our purposes here it suffices to mention that this involved feasting the dead with meat and cherry juice, lavishing them with bundles of sage and—of course—smoking pipes. And eagles captured by hunters were and often still are treated similarly. This makes perfect sense if we take into account that the deceased are said to become eagles that soar into the sky, thus reaching the land of the dead. The Milky Way is their path and the stars we see are the glow of their campfires.³⁰

Already in 1945 one ethnographer who worked among the Dakota Sioux, Verne F. Ray, entitled his report 'The Contrary Behavior Pattern in American Indian Ceremonialism'.³¹ His insight that *heyoka* rituals and

practices amount to a 'transformation to the anti-human state' prefigures my argument that clowning is primarily a contrary effort.³² Plunging one's hand in boiling water and slaughtering puppies are indications that one is no longer Lakota. Speaking 'backwards' marks the temporary suspension of one's Humanity. Kettle dances are instances of shape-changing whereby Clowns assume the position of Monsters. On the one hand, they are perfectly equivalent with Humans; i.e. they not less tangible, less visible, or less animate than ordinary Lakota. On the other hand, they are completely incommensurable. That is, they are neither 'other people' nor even 'other living beings'. If Lakota are Humans, then Clowns are not. If Lakota are Alive, then Clowns are Dead. That is why they blacken their face and give away all they possess just as mourners do. That is why they associate themselves with trees planted on grave sites. Yet, Clowns are Alive from their own perspective for they perceive everything the other way round. What is boiling hot for a Lakota is freezing cold for a Clown. Once again, this confirms that Life is always a positional quality within an animistic framework. These conclusions also throw new light on Sioux warfare. What happened at the battlefield was essentially a metamorphosis. When Crazy Horse and his fellow warriors attacked they were no longer Lakota but Thunderbirds. Wearing hawk feathers and blowing eagle bone whistles, they had turned into Hawks and Eagles. They were no longer Humans but Beasts. In other words, they were no longer Alive but Dead. It is not by chance that thunder and eagles are closely associated with the deceased. Each time sage appears and pipes are smoked, there is a metamorphosis from the Living into the Dead.

The Northern Pacific Rim—The Deceased as Guests

In Yup'ik animism, the relationship between mourners and the deceased resembles that between host and guest.³³ When somebody died, relatives would provide the corpse with food and clothing, as for a journey. They wailed continuously while preparing the body for burial. A lamp was always kept burning, for it was feared that otherwise the shade would not find its way to the land of the dead. Crucially, a 'passageway' for the deceased had to be opened and therefore all kinds of prohibitions applied. Restrictions against chopping, sewing, and the use of sharp instruments prevented the trail of the shade from being 'cut' (as we have seen, exactly the same restrictions were in effect when hunting seals). When the body was ready, the mourners removed it from the house through the central smoke hole; it was forbidden to use the normal entryway for this purpose, because that was the pathway for the living. After the burial, when the mourners returned from the grave site, they ostentatiously cut across their path with knives so that the deceased could not follow them. The whole village was fumigated with the smoke of wild celery and Labrador tea, and they also rubbed ashes over their bodies and painted their faces with charcoal. All usual activities

were restricted in the immediate aftermath.³⁴ Remarkably, the mourners were expected to behave ‘happily’:

[T]he bereaved had to act happy so that the dead would feel happy. In important ways the bereaved were connected to the dead, their mirror image in the world of the living and as such responsible for their condition. During the mourning period, the bereaved must be invisible, noiseless, odourless, inactive, and free from unhappy thoughts. In short, they had to act in ways that undercut or deemphasized their humanity and approximated as closely as possible the disembodied quality of the human shade.³⁵

During the entire mourning period (which lasted four to five days) the bereaved ‘were required to act dead until the departed had passed into their new abode’.³⁶ A similar period of inactivity was required following a successful hunt. The skulls and bones of the prey received special treatment. Basically, those of land mammals were thrown in the water whereas those of sea mammals were buried in the ground. Ann Fienup-Riordan explains: ‘[Creatures] of the land and sea [were perceived] as similar in that their destinations in death were the opposite of the space they inhabited during life. Seals yearned for fresh water. Beluga whales sought to rest on dry land. Conversely, wolves were feted with cooked beluga skin and small land mammals with seal oil—both products from the sea.’³⁷ In short, death was conceived of as a reversal in position. This was especially manifest at the ‘great feast for the dead’. On this occasion, which took place only once every five to ten years, the dead were invited into the village and treated as honoured guests.

What emerges is that the bereaved assume the same position as the deceased. The funerary rites imply a shift of shapes: mourners are no longer Alive but Dead—hence their propensity to ‘act dead’, as Fienup-Riordan aptly expresses it. Clearing a passageway that goes through the smoke hole rather than through the normal entryway is a contrary effort. The fumigation with wild celery and the darkening by means of ashes or charcoal indicate that all those present are no longer Human. What takes place is a metamorphosis from Yup’ik into Shades, from the Human into the Monstrous. Clearly, this entails a shift of perspective: what the former perceive as terrible is experienced as a happy occasion by the latter. This changed viewpoint explains why the mourners perceive the deceased as ‘one of them’, that is, as a respected guest. The Dead view the Dead as fellow human beings, as fellow living beings. Once again, we see that Humanity and Life have to be grasped as positional qualities. This also means that the successful hunter does not ‘kill’. Quite the contrary: he makes Alive! Offering a seal fresh water or lavishing a wolf with beluga skin is turning a Beast into a familiar Animal. These are specifically Yup’ik efforts which turn the Dead into the Living. The prey is put on equal footing with its pursuer, just

as the deceased is put on equal footing with the mourners. That is why both hunting and funerals are envisaged as receiving a guest.

The Deceased as Guests, Once More

At Ainu funerals, the deceased used to be entertained by telling amusing tales. Millet cakes and saké were placed next to the body. Willow sticks with curled shavings were made, for instance in the form of a fish owl (the '*kamuy* of the village'). The owl's wings would be the wrong way round, pointing forward rather than backward. When death is around, one ethnographer notes, 'everything is the reverse of what it ought to be'.³⁸ One of the elders would then address the deceased as a *kamuy* or Visitor, stating that he/she was now no longer an Ainu like them; the deceased was requested to accept the food and drink as a farewell gift. The mourners were served a copious dinner, washed down with lots of saké. Thus, the dead were sent off to the world of the *kamuy*, where they 'walk about upside down, after the manner of flies, so that their feet meet ours'.³⁹ The corpse would be rolled in a mat turned inside out and brought to the grave by mourners wearing their coats inside out or upside down.⁴⁰ It was buried together with the deceased's dearest possessions such as swords, bows, or jewellery. Crucially, all links with the dead had to be destroyed. Sometimes their house was burnt. Widows were not even supposed to mention their husband's name. Interestingly, the dead were said to perceive themselves as the living; from their point of view, the Ainu were the ones who were dead:

[After death, the Ainu expect] to have bodies in form exactly like the present, to live in houses, to have their daily work to do, their hunting and fishing stations, their dogs and other animals. They will laugh and talk, eat and drink as now, and altogether they think they will have a very material existence. But the curious thing about the people who live a life beyond the grave is that they look upon persons who have not yet crossed the river of death as ghosts, and consider themselves to be natural and substantial people. They think of us, in fact, just as we do of them.⁴¹

Relatives and friends were invited to a ceremony for the ancestors a few times per year. On such occasions, the ancestors were received as honoured guests and lavished with food, saké, and curled shavings, before being sent off again (a practice that has much in common with the Ainu's treatment of the Japanese during greeting ceremonies, as we have seen, and with their bear festival, as we shall see).⁴² What to make of all this? I suggest that the deceased shifts shape: s/he turns from Ainu into Visitor, s/he changes from Human into Monster. The mourners assume the same position as the Visitor. Each time saké is consumed and curled shavings appear, a metamorphosis takes place. All those who attend the funeral are no longer Alive

but Dead. Wearing one's coat inside out or upside down is a contrary effort: those who engage in it are no less Dead than the deceased themselves. Because they occupy the same position, mourners and the departed are able to interact with each other as equals: as hosts and guests. From their own viewpoint they are Alive, whereas they are Dead from the perspective of Ainu who do not participate in the funerary events. Whereas Ainu view themselves as Alive, those who have departed view them as ghosts—that is, as Dead. Once again, we are led to the conclusion that Life and Death can only be understood as positional qualities.

Southern Asia—Incense and Tigers: Batek Mortuary Practices

In Batek animism, the deceased depart either to the sky or to the underworld, where they become *hala'*, Devourers.⁴³ As we have seen, there are many sorts of Devourers but perhaps one of the most notorious ones is the man-eating tiger. Kirk Endicott notes that 'the dead may appear to the living in dreams or in the flesh, usually in their tiger-form'.⁴⁴ Tree-burials used to be customary.⁴⁵ The extensive use of incense, aromatic leaves, and flowers was crucial at such occasions. Mourners would sing strange songs full of obscure words and foreign expressions. The corpse would be wrapped in the prettiest sarong available. The colours and patterns of the cloth had to be distinctive, as they determined what the deceased's tiger-body would look like. For example, the fur of a Devourer would be blue and yellow rather than black and red as with ordinary tigers. Normally, the grave site would be abandoned forever. Yet, some did deliberately seek contact with the deceased; for aspiring shamans it was perhaps the most effective way to obtain knowledge and to augment their power. As Endicott describes, they would visit a burial-site and sing until a tiger appeared:

The person waiting at the grave must be alone and he must show no sign of fear when the *hala'*-tiger approaches. The novice orders the tiger to come near, and then he burns some incense and blows smoke on it. This causes the *hala'* to assume his human form. Then the *hala'* teaches the novice all sorts of useful songs and spells . . . He then gives the novice a tiger-form body of his own and teaches him how to enter and use it. . . . This initial training may take as long as a week, during which time the novice remains by the grave. When the instruction is finished, the novice blows incense smoke on the *hala'*, and he returns to the form of a tiger.⁴⁶

This passage confirms that shamans had privileged access to the realm of death; they were skilful shape-shifters who could take up two positions: *batek* and *hala'*, Batek and Tiger, Human and Devourer, Alive and Dead. The burning of incense always indicated a metamorphosis: Humans changed into Monsters or Beasts. The singing of incomprehensible songs marked a shift from the Living into the Dead. Mourners who adorned themselves with aromatic leaves and flowers assumed the same position as the deceased wrapped in his or her colourful sarong; just like the novice

shaman who blew smoke on the grave, they were not Alive but Dead. In short, death is tantamount to metamorphosis in Batek animism. Very similar ideas are prevalent in Chewong animism. Chewong forest dwellers recount that people were sometimes preyed on and eaten by colugos and turned into such arboreal gliding mammals as a result.⁴⁷ Yet, the victims kept seeing themselves as ordinary human beings, whereas human flesh now appeared to them as edible meat. The deceased have ‘different eyes’, as the Chewong express it. This confusion of the perspective of Humans and that of Beasts—that of the Living and that of the Dead—recurs time and again. Sometimes it was deliberately exploited. When someone had recently died, a shaman would guard the house by waving a mangrove palm leaf. This frightened the lingering deceased, for they perceived the leaf as a spear.⁴⁸

To Die is Failing to Masticate

‘The Ongees’, Vishvajit Pandya states, ‘believe that the death of human beings, loss of weight, and the dispersal of smell are all ways and steps in which humans are transformed into spirits’.⁴⁹ Death is a ‘change of position’, as he fortuitously expresses it. This change of position is always marked by a loss of weight and the absorption of smell. In Ongee animism, to die is to become light and boneless. It is quite literally becoming spirit-like or, better, Absorber-like. What takes place is a change of shape, whereby Ongees turn into Absorbers (*tomya*), Humans into Monsters.⁵⁰ Whereas the Living emit smell, the Dead absorb it. As indicated before, restricting the dispersal of one’s smell is a specifically Human effort. In this context, it is the primary condition of Life. The equation of Absorbers and the Dead is explicit. Just like the former, the latter are said to lack lower teeth. In other words, both are unable to masticate. At funerals, it is absolutely essential to remove the lower jawbone from the corpse. The mourners decorate themselves, as one ethnographer observes, ‘to resemble the [Absorbers]’, while abstaining from applying the usual red paint or white clay.⁵¹ Ordinary foods such as pork or turtle are avoided; instead, soft or liquid items are consumed. Evidently, this conspicuous annulment of mastication is a contrary effort: mourners are shape-shifters. By omitting their normal body covering they are no longer Alive but Dead.

Ongee people do not consider death as a mere end-point. Time and again, it recurs at specific moments throughout the life course. The initiation of boys is a telling example.⁵² At such occasions only honey and other soft ‘spirit foods’ would be consumed; the ever so crucial activity of masticating is deliberately suspended. In the words of Pandya: ‘In the course of the initiation ritual the Ongees send the initiate to the spirits and then bring him back. Consequently, the Ongees cause the death and birth of the initiate.’⁵³ At the beginning of the ritual, the principal initiator would walk around the initiate, holding a pig skull, grunting dramatically, and scratching the

ground just as pigs do when they search for tubers in the forest.⁵⁴ Alternatively, he could display the behaviour of a turtle.⁵⁵ The initiate is equated to a nautilus shell, which has the peculiar property that it floats but never sinks.⁵⁶ As such, these shells are the epitome of lightness. It is precisely this quality that enables the initiate to go up to the Absorbers, rather like the mythical nautilus that carried a bird and a snake to the sky.⁵⁷ The whole procedure is clearly a metamorphosis. The initiator is no longer Ongee but Pig or Turtle; no longer Human but Beast. The initiate is no longer Ongee but Absorber; no longer Human but Monster. Both initiator and initiate may be animate, but they are at the same time Dead. As long as the ritual continues, Life is suspended.

Eastern Africa—Mourners as Hoofed Ones

Uduk burial rites are elaborate and involve the singing of laments and funeral chants. During the entire mourning period the close relatives of the deceased 'sit black'. They darken their bodies with a mixture of sesame oil and charcoal powder and refrain from wearing beads.⁵⁸ The principal aim of the whole procedure, according to Wendy James, is to make sure that the *arum* is separated from the corpse: 'The re-emergence of a body decayed but still animated by *arum* is a vision to instil dread and awe'.⁵⁹ In order to avoid being haunted by such ghosts, cattle and goats are sacrificed. This is remarkable, because it only ever happens in that kind of situation. The Uduk are emphatic about it. Cattle are not kept for food or prestige and are actually quite useless in everyday life; they just keep them 'in case of funerals'.⁶⁰ James provides the following description:

[If a senior person has died, an ox] will be tethered with a rope around its neck, and the rope passed through the hut door to the right hand of the corpse. The people will then spear the animal. I have even heard of a funeral where a herd of cattle was let loose at the funeral, and spears were sent flying at them from all directions (which evokes the scene of the hunt).⁶¹

Note that the ox is not killed as in ordinary circumstances (by cutting its throat) but speared; it is, in other words, treated as a 'hoofed' creature from the bush. At the funeral of a master of the horn it was customary to organize a real hunt.⁶² The mourners would go into the savannah to spear gazelles, antelopes, giraffes—all sorts of hoofed specimens. The master of the horn, who is referred to as a 'hoofed creature' himself, is said to herd them; that is, he perceives them as tame rather than wild. From the perspective of the deceased, antelopes are cattle, giraffes are camels. At the funeral of an ebony diviner, however, people would not dare to go hunting.⁶³ Instead of encountering antelopes and other hoofed animals worth spearing, they fear to come across lions, leopards, and other dangerous clawed animals.

It is no surprise that ebony diviners themselves are commonly envisaged as 'clawed creatures'. In any case, funerals are always concluded by 'fixing' or 'settling' the grave.⁶⁴ The already buried corpse would be unearthed and its bones anointed with red ochre, before returning them to the grave. Finally, large amounts of beer are consumed and the mourners, who had been sitting black throughout, now paint themselves red.

Obviously, Uduk funerary practices are characterised by a change of perspective. Cattle and other tame animals are perceived as *arum* or 'Hoofed Ones', that is, as wild creatures from the bush. In my phraseology: they turn into Beasts. To spear them rather than cutting their throat is a contrary effort. Those who blacken themselves and remove their beads are no longer Alive but Dead. They temporarily change from *wathim pa* into *arum*, from Uduk into Hoofed Ones, from Humans into Monsters. Likewise, those who go into the savannah to hunt all sorts of Hoofed Ones temporarily turn into Hoofed Ones themselves. In short, mourners take up the position of the Dead. Yet, everything indicates that they perceive themselves as Alive from their own point of view. James is emphatic: 'Uduk are of the opinion that life in the land of the dead, that is the realm of those thoroughly and properly buried, is very realistic and much like that they already know. Villages are inhabited by all—old and young, women, men, and babies; there are even cows, goats, and chickens. Normal activities such as watering animals, or dancing in the evenings, are carried out in the same way as among the living.'⁶⁵ In sum, Life is always envisaged as a positional quality in Uduk animism. To repaint oneself red marks a metamorphosis: a Hoofed One turns back into an Uduk, a Monster becomes Human again.

When Samburu Remove Their Beads

'Cutting' the deceased is singularly important in Maa animism. Bilinda Straight states: 'Almost every aspect of Samburu mortuary practices is designed to successfully cut death off from the living'.⁶⁶ Among other things, this involves the sacrifice of livestock and the offering of its fat, together with milk and tobacco. The deceased are stripped of their ornaments, their head is shaved, and their clothes removed. Ideally, all personal possessions must be destroyed. The corpse is normally placed under an acacia tree and covered with green leaves. Whereas burials are common nowadays, the Samburu used to leave the corpse exposed to scavengers whom they attributed a cleansing function. Hyenas were supposed to eat the corpse—thus its associated unpropitious-ness was disposed of. When a funeral is completed, the implements used for the ritual should be smeared with fat. Close relatives, age-mates, and all those who 'share their hair' with the deceased shave their head. Mourners remove their ornaments. In this manner, the 'cut' is completed. Failing to do so has severe consequences; those who do not fulfil their mortuary duties appropriately are ostracised. In a 1994 interview with Straight, one woman gives the example of a migrant

father who did not attend the ceremony for one of his deceased children: 'If the man fails to come where that work [hair-shaving] is being done, he becomes an outsider/foreigner. He doesn't get to the home, and if he does come home, he will just remain far [from people]—an outsider. He's like a wild thing/thing from the [bush]'.⁶⁷

The removal of ornaments deserves some elaboration. Straight underlines that it is not only appropriate but expedient to dress as a proper Samburu, at least in everyday circumstances. Removing one's ornaments before milking a cow would invite disaster: 'it is to suggest that one is terribly sick or dead already, not a very propitious way to request a cow's fecundity'.⁶⁸ The link between ornaments and life is indeed quite explicit:

A woman without beads is not only *not* a person, she signals her ill health or invites disease. As women have repeatedly told me, an abundance of beads is a sign of health—of health that accompanies wealth in a society for which abundant animals mean abundant food. Conversely, women who are very sick remove their beads—they are not well enough to dress fully and engage in their routine tasks. Old women reduce their number of beads as they near the end of life but keep at least a few until they die. Upon death, a person is stripped of all ornaments—thus it is said that only a dead person has no ornaments.⁶⁹

Death stinks, according to Samburu pastoralists. Its stench is dangerous because it attracts both living kinsmen and livestock, usually with fatal consequences. The interdependence between cattle and the person who milks them is particularly noteworthy. For example, the cows of a deceased woman may wander into the bush to seek where her corpse has been laid. They are said to follow her smell, and thus end up eaten by some predator. In the words of one man: 'The livestock are consumed in the bush like that because the livestock finish, looking as if they have followed that person who has died'.⁷⁰ Yet, death is never envisaged as annihilation in an absolute sense. In a 2001 interview, another man suggested it is more a matter of metamorphosis: 'some go and become birds, others go and become hyenas'.⁷¹ Occasional sightings of such creatures instigate Samburu people to offer tobacco, considered as the food of the dead. Finally, I mention that their 'cultural cousins', the Maasai, have very similar customs.⁷² The shaving of hair, the suffocation of an ox whose fat is used to smear the corpse, and the devouring by scavengers are only a few parallels.

By now, my argument is familiar: I propose that not only the deceased but also the mourners are Dead. All those involved in the sacrifice of cattle and the offering of tobacco are no longer Alive. Shaving one's hair and removing one's ornaments are markers of Monstrosity. However, everything depends on the point of view. Mourners and the deceased perceive each other as fellow Samburu. Those who fail to attend the funeral, such as that negligent migrant father, are considered Monsters. From the perspective of those who

participate in the funeral, all those present at the mortuary rites are Alive (including the deceased) whereas all those who are absent are Dead. Once more, we notice that Life and Death are conceived of as positional qualities in animism. What is peculiar here is that pastoralists and their cattle always occupy the same position. Clearly, Maa animists do not conceive of their cattle as Beasts. Cattle may not be included within Humanity but they are closely entwined with it. Indeed, cattle are always Alive from the viewpoint of those who herd them. Given this convergence of perspectives it comes as no surprise that when the latter dies and transforms into a Scavenger or some other creature of the wilds, the former stray into the bush. Being devoured by carrion-eating predators is a metamorphosis: Humans and their Cattle turn into Beasts.

MORTUARY RITES AS METAMORPHOSIS

When confronted with death, animists respond in a great variety of ways. In this chapter, we have seen that mourners whip, consume tobacco and rum, remove their ornaments, blacken their bodies with ashes, refrain from masticating, shave their head, etc. An element that deserves more attention is the use of special languages, esoteric incantations, and archaic expressions, which recurs with remarkable consistency. Arnold van Gennep made this point long ago, in his *Essai d'une théorie des langues spéciales* (1908), but it has never been followed through properly. Diverse as they may be, these various practices always constitute what I refer to as a contrary effort: engaging in such behaviour and/or using such expressions implies losing one's Humanity. Actually, this insight was prefigured by Robert Hertz, in the essay mentioned in the beginning of the chapter:

[The relatives of the deceased] are forsaken . . . The ban which is imposed on them affects their entire way of life. In consequence of the funerary contagion they are changed, and set apart from the rest of humanity; therefore they can no longer live the way others do. They may not share the diet nor follow the ways of dressing or adornment or of arranging the hair which are proper to individuals who are socially normal and which are the sign of this community to which (for a time) they no longer belong; hence the numerous taboos and special prescriptions to which people in mourning must conform.⁷³

Hertz alludes to the fact that mourners change shape into Monsters or Beasts. They may be animate, but they are no longer Alive. Mortuary rituals should be understood as instances of metamorphosis whereby the Living transform into the Dead. Hertz himself worded it thus: '[Mourners] are truly "people of death". They live in darkness, dead themselves from a social point of view'.⁷⁴ As such, they are not fundamentally different from

the magicians and the shamans discussed in the previous chapter. There is no clear separation between activities of curing and those of mourning, just as there is no hard-and-fast distinction between illness and decease. These are all manifestations of the same overall phenomenon: Death. In that sense, mourners are impromptu shamans whereas mortuary rites are improvised forms of shamanism. In both cases, one's position depends on the perspective. Just as shamans, mourners may be Alive from their own point of view, but from that of an outsider they are Dead. With regards to recent anthropological discussions, these observations about the temporary suspension of Life during funerals and rituals more generally substantiate the suggestion—most prominently advocated by Tim Ingold—that life must not necessarily be grasped as an inherent property of things.⁷⁵ On the basis of what we have seen in this chapter, one could add that death should not inevitably be understood as an inherent property of things either. The same individual may be Dead during a ritual, but Alive in ordinary circumstances. In regimes of animism, the Living and the Dead are perfectly equivalent. The latter are not more 'symbolic' or less 'real' than the former; both shapes are equally tangible, material, and animate. More generally, there is no qualitative distinction between Life and Death.

6 Catastrophe

Examining Collective Metamorphoses

I would guess that those who are categorized as animists have no word for ‘really’, for insisting that they are right and others are victims of illusions.

—Isabelle Stengers (2012: 5)

The theory of evolution is a centrepiece of the modern cosmology. Those who champion it envisage life as a continuous process of gradual change. Animism juxtaposes metamorphosis to evolution, and catastrophe to permanence. However, this alternative is never taken entirely seriously. ‘They’—the animists—are forever entrapped within their culture; ‘our’ scientists are the only ones who have direct access to nature. This final chapter questions that all too comfortable arrangement.

THE LINK BETWEEN RITUAL AND DISASTER

Animists propose metamorphosis instead of evolution, catastrophe instead of permanence, and regular extinction instead of perpetual continuity. Yet, proponents of the Western cosmology are not overly impressed by this (apparently) preposterous challenge. They easily brush it off by means of their great bifurcation: metamorphosis is subsumed under shamanism, evolution under biology; catastrophe falls under magic, permanence under science; life’s periodic extinction amounts to a mythical representation, its enduring continuity is a historical reality. However it is formulated, this a priori division into artefacts and facts has the benefit of preserving science’s comfort zone and of leaving biology’s prerogative over life as a domain of investigation intact. In this bifurcated framework, there is no way in which so-called indigenous people could be taken entirely seriously.¹ ‘They’, however well-intentioned, are necessarily culturally biased; ‘we’ (or at least ‘our’ scientists) are the only ones who have unimpeded access to nature. In what follows, I go against this conventional setup by showing that ‘their’ metamorphosis is not any more distorted or any less plausible than ‘our’ evolution; ‘their’ animism is not any less worthy or any more exotic than ‘our’ naturalism. In order to accomplish this, I take you to Esmeraldas once more.

On the 31st of December 1999 frantic crowds gathered in San Miguel, one of the foremost ceremonial centres of the Chachi. People had congregated because they feared the world would end there and then. Some had picked up on the prophecies of doom concerning the new millennium and

this had quickly developed into a general feeling of terror. Incidentally, there was also intense volcanic activity at that time and the sky was darker than usual. Many were convinced that an enormous deluge or a devastating earthquake would follow. People were speaking about 'the perishing of the world' (*tu piyanu*). What happened during these panic-stricken moments is remarkable: the Chachi organized a wedding festival. Musicians brought marimbas and various kinds of drums and played continuously. One of the participants described it to me as follows:

We were all there and kept an eye on the clock. As it got closer to midnight, we became more and more anxious. Just before twelve everybody was nervously checking their watches. A few had small portable radios and listened attentively. Some were so distressed that they started crying. At 12 o'clock nothing happened, no flood, no earthquake . . . A big relief, but we decided to stay on for a while, to be entirely sure that nothing would happen.

In fact, this kind of occurrence is far from unique. Catastrophic anxieties frequently occur in regimes of animism all over the world. And such moments of crisis usually trigger some kind of 'ritual' response. This has been known for a long time, thanks to the efforts of such pioneering researchers as Mircea Eliade, who examined apocalyptic themes comparatively.² But Eliade has been side-lined in contemporary anthropology. His sweeping generalisations are unwarranted—it is objected—because they oversimplify political and historical configurations that are much more complex than he acknowledges. This common critique may be justified to some extent, but for my purposes here I would like to focus on the merits of Eliade's endeavour rather than the flaws. It would be all too easy to use the mistakes of those few who are willing to engage with a wide range of ethnographic material as an excuse to give up worldwide comparison altogether. The present chapter not only aims to show that such an undertaking remains worthwhile, but that it is actually indispensable to reach a satisfactory understanding of the—by all accounts—striking ubiquity of disaster within animism. The link between catastrophes and Chachi weddings is my starting point.

Chachi people have a veritable obsession with disaster. Most of them can describe in minute detail how catastrophes took place in the past. On one occasion, they told me, there was a solar eclipse. When the whole world became dark, frightening events began to occur. All kinds of objects such as stones or axes started flying around like insects. Suddenly, trees could talk. The Chachi were totally confused. In the darkness, they could no longer find their way. As they could no longer look for food, they got very hungry. Some fruit trees and certain palms were friends of the Chachi. They gave instructions about how to locate them: 'I am here. If you want to eat something come over here. Here I am!' But not all trees

were so friendly; the Chachi were helped only by those whom they always treated well. The trees they used to chop down (to make canoes or sleeping mats, for instance) turned against them and were out for revenge. Benefiting from the dark, giant ogres lifted up the roofs of houses, abducting and eating many defenceless people. Some Chachi turned into man-eaters themselves. Brothers ate their sisters and sons ate their fathers. Mothers even ate their little babies. In the words of one woman: 'As it was dark, people could not see what they ate. Their own relatives had begun to smell like pineapple, so they were under the delusion that they were consuming fruit'.

After the eclipse, a huge thunderstorm followed which turned into a hurricane. Axes flew around, trying to kill the Chachi. The axes had always been 'maltreated' (by knocking them against trees and so on) and now it was their moment of vengeance. And it was not just axes. All objects that people were accustomed to 'maltreat' now became dangerously inimical. The stones they occupy to grind plantains tried to smash the Chachi. A whole variety of kitchen utensils transformed into lethal projectiles. Pots, plates, and spoons attacked people. These were all angry as in everyday life they had been burnt with fire (the pots), badly treated by filling them with hot substances (the plates), or tortured by stirring them in boiling food (the spoons). Many people perished, but some survived as they were helped by friendly objects, that is, objects they had always treated with care and affection. 'During such catastrophes', one man told me, 'it is as if the whole world reverses'. He maintained that whereas tornadoes uproot the heaviest trees, the lightest species remain unharmed. Guayacan trees, known to be the sturdiest in the area, would be drifting through the air like feathers. Balsa, which has the lightest kind of wood, becomes like a stone—people used to run for shelter under such trees. Even nowadays, when there is a heavy storm and children are afraid, they may be advised to hold a piece of balsa. What is more, species that are usually harmless would turn into redoubtable predators. Opossums attack people, bats suck their blood, and owls eat their eyes.

Besides hurricanes, earthquakes are a prominent topic. The elderly relate about instances where the water of rivers suddenly turned dirty. Rotting tree trunks that had been stuck at the bottom for years would appear on the surface. Narrators agree that such omens announce a seism of the most devastating kind. On various occasions, trees fell, houses collapsed, and people got smashed. Sometimes it was so bad that houses simply vanished in the ground. Remarkably, those who endured such quakes best were not the new and sturdy houses—as one would expect—but the old and shabby ones. Again, we are confronted with a reversal: during the catastrophe what is sturdy becomes weak and vice versa. This idea of a reversal of the world had already been documented in the early 20th century by Samuel Barrett, who links earthquakes to the appearance of 'those without anus', monstrous beings that feed on the steam escaping from cooking pots:

[T]here came a tremendous earthquake which overturned the earth and buried [those without anus] within it, where they still live in the same manner as when above ground. Then the [Chachi] were created to live upon the earth; but at some future time another great earth convulsion will overturn the world again, bringing [those without anus] to the surface and burying the [Chachi] and all other human beings.³

One of my own acquaintances described an earthquake that took place in his native village some fifteen years ago as a horrible experience. Houses were shaking and the pots in the kitchens fell down. People ran outside in panic. 'They were jumping, screaming, and crying in fear', he told me, 'because they all assumed it was the end of the world'. After that incident, the villagers hurried to the ceremonial centre, where they entered the church and begged God-the-Father (*diusapa*) for mercy (*miseecuya*—from the Spanish *misericordia*).

Floods and tsunamis (locally known as *visitas*) are also recurring elements. When a member of my host family spotted a vulture one day she remarked: 'In the past, these birds ate Chachi. The elderly tell that in the past God-the-Father used to be much angrier than he is nowadays. He destroyed the entire world every two years or so. He sent great waves and all Chachi perished in a huge deluge. When the water had retired, the vultures feasted on their corpses. For God-the-Father it was quite a burden: every so often he had to create new Chachi'. At another occasion, a bilingual teacher recounted what happened during a massive flood of the river Cayapas in 1972. Never before had he seen something so terrible. For days in a row, there was a superabundant rainfall. The river burst its banks and entire houses were swept away. Villages along the river had to be evacuated and people had to camp in places that were located higher up. Various Chachi got caught by the violent currents and drowned. More recently, in 2003, another calamitous flood occurred in the same area. Although nobody appears to have drowned, many lost domestic animals and other possessions. Just as during the 1972 flood, those who were most frightened went to the ceremonial centre to drum and to play marimba.

This illustrates that New Year 2000 was not the only time that a fiesta was organized. In fact, any catastrophe of significant proportions is systematically followed by a celebration in the ceremonial centre. Consider the following account, recorded by Milton Altschuler in the 1960s:

During 1959–60 rumors were constantly in the air in Ecuador that the end of the world was going to take place soon. These rumors had reached the Cayapa [the former name of the Chachi]. According to Gabriel [a prominent Chachi], Jesus carries the world in his arms and when the sins of the people pile up, the world gets heavier and heavier until at last the burden becomes insupportable, and Jesus lets the world fall. That, said Gabriel, will happen very soon unless the Cayapa can

appease the wrath of God by holding a special fiesta . . . Gabriel was so concerned that he sent a message to the chiefs of the other sections [that is, to the Governors of the other ceremonial centres], inviting them to a meeting at his home to discuss the impending disaster and the means by which to avert it. He wanted each group to stage a fiesta at its own ceremonial center at the same time 'to give added strength'. To make doubly sure, he wanted four young children to be married 'as they did in the old days.' Being young they would, of course, be without sin, and Jesus would find the sight touching and forgive the world.⁴

The coincidence of ritual activity with circumstances of general panic is a well-attested observation, at least in the ethnography of the Americas. What surprises here is the Chachi's peculiar choice for weddings. Why celebrate a wedding when you are struck by the worst misery? When I asked this directly, none of my informants could give an unequivocal answer. Phenomena like solar eclipses, some explained to me, are a warning to people who live badly. All catastrophes are a punishment of God-the-Father or, as some express it literally, they are a whipping. He chastises in retaliation for all the 'sins' (*ujcha*) people have committed. It is up to the Chachi to beg God for forgiveness (*alabar a Dios*) and to better their lives. All my informants agreed that the best way to prevent the destruction of the world is to organize a wedding fiesta. In relatively moderate emergencies such as the 2003 flood people may content themselves with mimicking a marriage and just play the instruments and dance. In particularly bad cases, however, that is not enough. Nothing less than a real wedding will do. Preferably, there should even be several weddings at once. The couples that are planning to get married anyway are obvious candidates. When no couples were available, the elderly used to summon particular youths to marry, if they wanted to or not. When the situation was extremely precarious, they even married young children. Such children's weddings no longer take place, but in the not so distant past they were all but a rarity. Most of my elderly informants remembered such occasions from their youth.

The question remains: why is there a link between marriages and catastrophes? In order to clarify the issue, I now examine Chachi weddings in more depth. It should be noted that such weddings are planned long beforehand in ordinary circumstances. They take place in the ceremonial centres, especially at Easter. Wedding fiestas are considered extremely important; they involve considerable preparation and—by local standards—lavish expenses. It is not by chance that the period before Easter is the high season for the Black timber traders that operate in the river Cayapas area. In the upstream Chachi villages, there would be an intense activity of extracting commercial wood, while the river temporarily turns into a busy highway full of lumber rafts. This has much to do with the upcoming festivities: the more one earns, the better one can feast. The principal requisites are rum (*ishkala*, *aguardiente*), maize beer (*chicha*), tobacco (*cigarillos*), and candles

(*velas*). Those who are getting married and their 'wedding godparents', the *madrina* and the *padrino*, jointly finance most of the fiesta. The guests, who may come from far away, are also expected to contribute. What happens during the preparatory phase gives us some clues about the relation with disaster.

In the days before the Easter weddings one is supposed to act cautiously because, as some express it, 'Christ's protection has fallen away'. Bathing in the river should be avoided for instance. The prohibition may be largely ignored nowadays, but plenty of stories are still recounted about imprudent swimmers who ended up as dolphins, lizards, or toads. In a similar vein, walking in the forest must be kept to a minimum for all kinds of accidents are likely to happen. There is an increased risk of being bitten by venomous snakes, which all of a sudden seem to abound. If one goes out alone at night one is bound to run into various kinds of malicious goblins (*bereju*, *duende*), who perform beautiful music. Marimba-playing and guitar-playing goblins are reported; I was assured that for every type of musical instrument a matching goblin exists. The latter are always envisaged as reversed beings. When one hears their music vaguely and distantly they are in fact nearby. When they sound loud and clear, by contrast, they are far away. Those who are assaulted by such a goblin but manage to survive are said to return as virtuoso musicians, although they may never have touched an instrument before.

People also refer to 'drumming ghosts' (*aslaa ujmu*), which make a distinctive drum-beat noise. Some compare it to the sound of hollowing out a tree with an axe while crafting a canoe, whereas others liken it to playing the *bombo*, the big drum that is used at wedding fiestas (cf. *infra*). One elderly man spoke from his own experience, when he told me: 'Those who craft canoes on Holy Friday act very dangerously, as it is the climax of Christ's passion and there is no protection. Drumming ghosts are people just like us, but I do not know where they live. You hear them, but you do not see them. When I was still a young boy we once noticed the noise of such a ghost and we all fled downstream in panic'. Others assured me that drumming ghosts have a hole at the front of their rib cage, from which blood is constantly dripping. If one looks inside there is nothing—no flesh, no organs. They are hollow. Their back, however, is very hard, more or less like the surface of a drum. They have whips which they use to flagellate themselves, and this is said to cause the sound of drumming. In brief, the likelihood of running into all kinds of inimical hybrids increases dramatically in the days before Easter; this provokes a general feeling of unease. One woman put it as follows: 'Everybody is afraid to go outside the house in that particular week'. I now turn to the wedding ritual itself, drawing on my own observations in April 2004.

On Good Friday a substantial crowd gathered in the San Miguel ceremonial centre. Most of them were Chachi, but several Blacks from neighbouring villages were also present. There was a marimba, several

kununus (small drums) and two *bombos* (big drums). Music was played until dawn, people smoked tobacco and some got drunk. The brides and the grooms arrived early the following morning. At the event that I witnessed there were four pairs. In the ceremonial house, the brides sat on one side of a bamboo partition, the grooms on the other. Their exceptionally colourful outfits deserve special mention. The brides had glittery dresses, while their face and the upper part of their body were covered by a veil. The veils were kept in place by headbands to which strips of old coins and tinsel garlands were attached. Some had festoons of little plastic bells, all in extravagant tints of gold, silver, green, and red. The grooms wore two red ribbons which they put crosswise over their shirts. They also had headbands of the same colour and a few had put a red handkerchief on top of their head. Behind the brides sat their respective *madrinas*, who constantly remained by their side. Likewise, each groom was accompanied by a *padrino*. This tight supervision is deemed indispensable, for it is feared that the newlyweds would otherwise sneak away with some wedding guest and behave promiscuously.

The dancing was initiated by the godparents, who opened with their respective brides or grooms. Then, friends and relatives of the couples began to dance. The same procedure was repeated time and again. If a guest wished to dance, he offered a soft-drink, beer, or some rum—first to the groom, then to the bride on the other side of the bamboo partition. With the help of her *madrina*, the bride then donned a ceremonial dress. Wrapped up in her veil, she avoided all eye-contact with the giver; the onlookers only saw her nose peeping out of the cloth. Thus, she danced with the man. Most dances only lasted for ten seconds or so. The two dancers stood close, facing each other. Whereas the man merely walked backwards and forwards a couple of times, the bride—following him closely—hopped rhythmically and swayed her arms. As the fiesta went on, the guests gradually got more and more inebriated. Each time they danced, they were served rum by both the bride and the groom. Some (both women and men) ended up so drunk that they almost lost consciousness. Once in a while, some of the men who had too much to drink engaged in brawls. It was the task of the Policemen (*chaitarukula*) to punish those who were overly excited and they did not hesitate to put incorrigible fighters into the stocks.

At night, the Policemen came to the foreground once more. As they took their whips, a stir went through the crowd: it was time for the general punishment. The Policemen chastised gently, not severely as they would when somebody had truly committed a mistake such as cheating or polygamy. Nobody was exempted: the newlyweds, the godparents, the elderly, women, and children all received at least one whiplash. All had to be chastised, I was told, because all had to some extent misbehaved in the past year. By being whipped one's 'sins' (*ujcha*) were forgiven. Those who tried to escape were tracked down and received an extra portion. After this rather turbulent intermezzo, the fiesta resumed as before. Near dawn, those who were still

capable performed the closing dance, known as *San Fan Fan*, a derivation from the Spanish *San Juan*. This was the only time that people danced collectively: brides, grooms, godparents, wedding guests, and even the musicians participated. Drums and the marimba were carried along. It was, to use Barrett's expression, 'a riot of fun and jollity'.⁵ The dancers exchanged instruments, bottles of rum, and pieces of their outfits. They also cracked risqué jokes and shouted mock insults. For instance, they would say to the groom: 'Your wife is sleeping around!' This outburst of noise and laughter marked the end of the wedding.

THE BIG METAMORPHOSIS

The wedding fiesta is the ultimate metamorphosis or, at any rate, a big metamorphosis. What takes place, I suggest, is a mass shape-shifting whereby all Humans turn into Monsters. The Living turn into the Dead. Strictly speaking, weddings *are* catastrophes. They are occasions when Life is suspended and Death prevails. Before explaining this in more depth I wish to emphasize a couple of points. The lavish and conspicuous spending of money is something that usually only happens at weddings and a few other occasions commonly qualified as 'ritual'. Similarly, the copious consumption of rum and tobacco is fairly strictly limited to such instances (mainly curing rites and funerals, as we have seen). Another important element is the use of esoteric language. Once in a while, the fiesta-goers would leave the ceremonial house to go into the adjacent church, where they utter exotic and/or archaic incantations that have no clear meaning in the vernacular. These supplications (*utya*) are not unlike those used by shamans when they cure the sick. Furthermore, it is highly significant that weddings are celebrated in ceremonial centres or *pebulu*, literally 'the village of the dead'. Most of the year, such centres are empty; people do not live there. They are only used on special occasions, mainly weddings and burials. Actually, these places are also graveyards: the dead are buried underneath the ceremonial house.

The wedding festival at Easter is announced by what one could call an institutionalised disaster. It is not just that serious catastrophes are followed by weddings—weddings are also preceded by catastrophes. It is during Holy Week that people report being bitten by poisonous snakes. It is in the days before Easter that people avoid trips in the forest or bathing in the river because they are scared to encounter all kinds of Beasts and Monsters such as drumming ghosts. To be precise, Chachi people are not afraid of such Monsters. Rather, fear is turning *into* a Monster against one's own will.⁶ Assaults by music-playing goblins should be understood as metamorphoses: the people who survive return as goblins themselves, what explains why they are suddenly envisaged as virtuoso musicians. That the link between weddings and metamorphoses is one of the most frequently

recurring themes in myth is not a coincidence. Consider the example of *pipiñi*, the aquatic Monster that is thought to be the cause of both drought and flooding:

During a celebration in Punta Venado [an ancient ceremonial centre] an unknown man appeared. Nobody knew he was a man-eater; he had the habit of eating Chachi fishermen. Dressed in beautiful, glittering clothes, he was so handsome that one of the girls wanted to marry him immediately. Preparations for the wedding were taken and at one point the man took off his clothes, which were entirely made of silver coins. That was the snake shedding its skin, but the girl did not notice. The beautiful man appeared to be incredibly thirsty. He asked to fill a canoe with water and to bring it in the ceremonial house. After drinking several canoes of water, which he experienced as consuming rum, the river almost dried up [Punta Venado is located along the Rio Caya-pas]. Then, people started to suspect that he might be *pipiñi*, the giant snake that inhales and vomits water. When they remarked: 'You drink so much, you are just like a water dragon' he got angry, took his wife and ran away towards the coast. They jumped into the sea and both transformed into water dragons.

What happens at the wedding ritual I have described is not so different—there is also a shift from the Human into the Monstrous. Everybody in the ceremonial centre—which is a graveyard after all—is no longer Alive but Dead. The brides and the grooms are the epitome of Monstrosity. Whereas ordinary Chachi are supposed to be strictly monogamous, the newlyweds are conceived of as sexually voracious—that is why they are constantly guarded by their godparents and that is why the brides wear a veil when they dance. But in the end, these precautions prove to be in vain: the couples, their godparents, and all the other participants emerge as incorrigible adulterers. Dancing is in fact equated to promiscuity. In that sense, the wedding can be understood as an orgy; it is defined in opposition to the monogamous restraint of everyday life. All those who dance at the wedding are adulterers who deliberately engage in a contrary effort—they are no longer Human. Little wonder, then, that the Policemen are so busy whipping and chastising. The dancers' excessive consumption of rum and tobacco and their exceptionally wild and aggressive behaviour are further indications of their Monstrosity. Clearly, those who attend the fiesta are akin to the Ferocious Indians, the Hill Dwellers, and all the other distinctly non-monogamous and warlike non-Chachi described in chapter two. The long queue that is formed at some point during the *San Fan Fan* closing dance instantiates a Water Dragon, which elucidates the glittery costume of such giant snakes in myth (most dancers are adorned with silver coins and colourful beads). I would add that the musicians also change shape: they are no longer Chachi but Marimba-Playing Goblins and Drumming

Ghosts, no longer Humans but Monsters. Of course, the Policemen are Monsters, too; their punishments and tortures are reminiscent of the cruel, man-eating Spaniards of the colonial epoch.

In this light, the inverted character of ceremonial centres is perhaps not so surprising. For instance, they are usually located near whirlpools, that is, in spots along the river where the current is obstructed and the water goes the other way round. In ordinary life, Chachi people explicitly avoid building their houses near such places. In other words, whereas the Living prefer to reside where the current is uninterrupted, the Dead congregate in locations that are quite literally the opposite. Just like the eclipses, hurricanes, and floods described earlier, weddings are catastrophes. At Easter, the entirety of Life is suspended and Death prevails. During the fiesta, the site of the ceremonial centre is a compression of the entire world. Chachi attendees often use Christian imagery to explicate this. They say that the world rests on wooden crosses, just as the ceremonial house where the dancing takes place is built on top of the graveyard, i.e. 'supported by crosses'. Wedding participants explained to me that each time somebody commits adultery the weight of the world augments and crosses are liable to snap. Each cross that breaks causes an earthquake or other disasters. Adulterers, it is said, 'have no cross' (*cuusa tajtu*). If too many breaches of monogamy occur the apocalypse is inevitable.⁷ This is what happens each year at Easter, notwithstanding the frenzied whippings of the Policemen: the crosses that support the world break. Here, we grasp the essential role of marriage, for every couple is explicitly equated to a new cross. Each wedding, then, establishes additional support to prevent the world from collapsing. Ultimately, everything depends on the perspective. What amounts to destruction from a Human point of view is salvation from that of a Monster. What the Living perceive as despicable conduct is an act of courage from the perspective of the Dead.

If it is true that Chachi weddings are catastrophes, the bigger question that arises is whether this is a unique feature or merely a specific instance of a much wider phenomenon. To formulate this in a more tentative way: in how far can we say that the occasions that anthropologists usually describe as 'rituals' are catastrophes? The following section is a first step towards a more comprehensive answer.

ANIMISM AND THE CONSPICUOUS RECURRENCE OF CATASTROPHES

Amazonia—Beer Feasts as Massacres

Wari' people relish telling stories about the catastrophes their forebears had to endure. For example, they recount how an old woman one day appeared in a village. She asked for fire, claiming that hers had gone out. The Wari' felt sorry for the poor wretch and allowed her to take some. But

they did not realize that she only appeared human—in fact, she was rain. Soon enough, the Wari’ noticed they had been tricked: there followed an incredible downpour, the river flooded, and fish swam into their houses. As a result of the deluge, people turned into all kinds of river creatures such as otters, hoatzins, trumpeters, and electric eels.⁸ This link between catastrophe and metamorphosis is not just something of the distant past. The theme recurs almost every year, not coincidentally always during the rainy season. According to Aparecida Vilaça, it unfolds as follows. One day, people would hear strange tunes near their settlement. A visitor adorned with the tail-feathers of a red macaw appears, accompanied by musicians playing bamboo flutes. They are received in an apparently rather bizarre way: all of them are obliged to consume all sorts of normally inedible items—mixtures of mud, of bitter fruits, of raw maize. Repeatedly, they are forced to drink until they vomit. The whole procedure is in fact an invitation. The macaw-feathered visitor is the ‘trunk-owner’, the principal organizer of a great feast.⁹ Back in his own village, he has prepared a hollowed trunk which serves as the container for maize beer. The ones who treat him so badly are his future guests.

Sometime later, when the maize in the trunk has fermented, the feast begins. Suddenly the guests appear from the forest, playing all kinds of flutes and drums, their bodies coated with annatto and designed with jaguar or snake motives. Standing in line, they dance and sing ancient songs. They act as predators and misbehave terribly, damaging houses, killing domestic animals, simulating sexual intercourse with their hosts’ wives, explicitly saying that they will eat them. In retaliation, the hosts force them to drink more and more maize beer, until they collapse. At that point, it is said that the guests have died.¹⁰ The beer is referred to as a mortal weapon, the hosts as assassins. Sometimes the guests arrive as collared peccaries, and the hosts would yell ‘Let’s kill peccaries!’ before obliging them to drink until they vomit.¹¹ In short, the guests are treated as prey. ‘If one participates in such an event’, Vilaça notes, ‘it is as if one is witnessing a massacre’.¹² She further remarks that such ‘massacres’ took place with intensified vigour in the period of the great epidemics.

A basic understanding of the workings of metamorphosis elucidates these at first sight disparate practices. The visitor who invites them is not a Wari’ who inhabits the interior forest but a Red Macaw that dwells near big rivers (as noted previously, macaws are envisaged as water creatures). He is not Human but a visitor from the watery world of Monsters and Beasts, not unlike the old woman in the deluge myth. That is why he is offered items that are inedible from a Wari’ perspective: as a Beast, he perceives it as appropriate food. The Wari’ treat him badly because it is assumed that things are the other way round from the Red Macaw’s point of view. To attend the feast is to shift shape. The annatto-covered guests are no longer Wari’ but Jaguars, Snakes, or Peccaries; they have changed from Humans into Beasts. They may be animate, but they are no longer Alive.

Their misbehaviour is clearly a contrary effort, which indicates that they are Dead. It comes as no surprise, then, that the guests are said to have died. From the viewpoint of the hosts, they are not people drinking maize beer but prey that is slaughtered. Drunkenness is perceived as a massacre, the feast as a catastrophe. Clearly, the coincidence of such occasions with epidemics is not accidental.

Tattooing as Disaster

In contrast to the Wari', Matis people suspended most of their ritual activities when they were struck by the great epidemics of the last century. Still, it is worth having a closer look at such rituals, for they reveal much about how catastrophes are dealt with in animism. Here I will focus on what is commonly known as the 'tattoo ceremony', an elaborate event that could last up to two weeks. Some have described it as an 'initiation' but Philippe Erikson points out that this is a bit of a misnomer because it was merely the culmination of a gradual accumulation of ornaments which stretched from birth to early adulthood.¹³ Around age five a rite was staged to pierce children's ears. Few years later, black, wooden 'whiskers' were inserted on both sides of their nose. At puberty they had their lower lip perforated and acquired their first labret. As one grew up, the number of ornaments augmented and their size increased. Tattooing was indeed only the climax of a long chain of events occurring throughout one's lifetime. But what did it entail, exactly? In the first place it required vast quantities of maize beer and smoked meat. During the preparatory phase women brewed while men went out to look for prey; both activities took place simultaneously. Matis hunting practices have already been discussed and therefore I will concentrate on brewing here.

With regards to making beer the role of its basic ingredient, maize, is paramount. First, one must be aware that this crop never figured in the ordinary diet; it had, as Erikson expresses it, an 'essentially ceremonial vocation'.¹⁴ In fact, the cultivation of maize prefigured the tattoo ritual in many respects. It took place in ancient orchards or abandoned gardens, never in the fields around the house where people grew their staple foods, manioc and plantains. Unlike other crops, maize was sown in a festive atmosphere by men who were singing special songs and had donned a particular costume, just as during the ritual. The very act of sowing corresponded in many of its details to that of tattooing. For example, they used a specific digging stick to 'inject' the soil, a procedure that was explicitly equated to a tattoo-needle pricking the skin. The impressively rapid maturation of maize was, perhaps wishfully, associated with the growth of children. And the plant itself was often referred to as a human being. Erikson writes: '[Maize] resembles humans not just in its appearance and its vitality, but also in its sexual reproduction which stands out in an agronomic system otherwise based on clones'.¹⁵ The beginning of the tattooing ritual

always coincided with the crop's ripening. Beer brewing was conceived of as the female equivalent of hunting. Just like the curare used to capture one's prey, maize is indeed said to turn 'bitter' when it ferments.

During the ritual people took off their habitual ornamentation, a highly exceptional measure given the ingrained character of ornaments. Instead, they appeared as maize—their head, arms, legs, and torso were adorned with corresponding parts of the plant. Dancers put on feathered masks and covered themselves in mud and foliage; they were the Whipping Corpses, who turned up every night as long as the ritual lasted. Others appeared as mammals and some even incarnated Whites, wearing shirts and trousers. Lots of maize beer and enormous quantities of smoked meat were consumed (ideally, all game species had to be available), resulting in a great deal of buffoonery and erotic play. Manioc, the quintessential food item in ordinary times, was conspicuously absent; Erikson was struck by the fact that 'not a single root was eaten as long as the ritual went on'.¹⁶ The tattooing itself took place in the men's house. Peach palm thorns were dipped in a black paste, a mixture of various 'bitter' substances, and were then used to tattoo the initiates' faces from left to right. This was a bloody and painful affair, but one had to undergo the ordeal as stoically as possible without revealing any trace of anxiety to the on-looking Whipping Corpses. At the end of the ritual the initiates head was shaven, giving them the appearance of Baldheads. Afterwards, they had to start from zero again; they were given new things, for all their possessions had been destroyed. The whole event concludes with, in the words of Erikson, a 'veritable rebirth'.

Yet again, we are confronted with metamorphosis. Taking off one's ornaments indicates that one is no longer Human. During the ceremony, Matis transform into Maize as well as into Whipping Shadows, Baldheads, and all sorts of Monsters and Beasts. As Maize, they perceive maize plants as fellow Humans; hence the emphasis on the 'human-like' qualities of that crop. Consuming maize beer rather than manioc is a contrary effort. Those who engage in it may be animate but they are no longer Alive. All participants are Dead. No wonder, then, that Erikson describes tattooing as 'a substitute of true death'.¹⁷ In fact, this shift from the Living into the Dead already starts during the preparations before the actual ceremony. Ancient orchards and abandoned gardens are places of Death and those who grow maize in them are no longer Alive; the cultivators are not Matis but, I suggest, Whipping Corpses (whose association with such particular sites is not coincidental); they are not Humans but Monsters. What the latter view as 'digging with sticks' is 'tattooing with needles' from the perspective of the former. Just like hunting, beer brewing can be grasped as an excursion into Death. It is not by accident that the brewers enhance their own 'bitterness' by consuming a stimulating root, which is otherwise only done by those who wish to augment their hunting skills.¹⁸ In all these events, the Living turn into the Dead. When this happens in great numbers, such as at the ceremony, we can legitimately speak of a disaster.

Northern America—The Apocalyptic Consequences of Gambling

Navajo people have a notable predilection for anecdotes about the disastrous. In the deserts of northern Arizona and New Mexico, ruin always appears to be an imminent possibility. Sliding sands, great dunes that swallowed those who climbed them, aggressive cactuses piercing those who passed near them, and crushing rocks which pursued people to roll over them are just a few examples.¹⁹ According to Navajo cosmology the world has already been destructed on various occasions: by whirlwinds and hail, by firestorms and floods, and also when the primeval monsters were slaughtered (recall the account of Flint Monster's slaying in chapter two). The great influenza epidemic of 1918 was believed to be presaged by the solar eclipse of June 8 of the same year.²⁰ For some reason, reed would always play a central role in salvaging the Navajo: for instance, they escaped the deluge by climbing a reed that grew from the water. Such reeds are identified with the 'sky pillars' that support the heavens.²¹ All these occasions of danger and destruction imply metamorphoses: Humans turn into Monsters, the Living transform into the Dead. It should not surprise us, then, that 'Monsters and dangers have the same function', as Gladys A. Reichard expresses it.²² Furthermore I would suggest that reed is a mark of Death: just like the curers who use reed-sticks stuffed with corn-pollen (cf. chapter four), those who are confronted with such woody grasses are no longer Alive.

The remarkable link between catastrophes and gaming deserves special mention. The figure of the Gambler (*noqoilpi*) is crucial in this respect.²³ Unbeatable at dice games, racing, and playing ball, he is portrayed as a gambler of great genius. However, his greed has apocalyptic consequences; excessive gambling always provokes death and disaster. All accounts agree on the fact that the maintenance of a certain balance is crucial: 'A gambler who wins too much is the same as having a world with too much daylight or darkness or too much summer or winter'.²⁴ In fact, this contrast between light and dark, prosperity and catastrophe, is a motif that recurs time and again. Whereas defeat is equated with dying, winning is envisaged as a kind of rebirth. Like all shape-shifters, the Gambler is duplicitous: witch and curer, responsible for destruction but also redeemer and saviour. As such, he is sometimes identified with Montezuma, the last emperor of the Aztecs and an archetypal gambler, whose imminent return has been predicted on many occasions, especially in times of distress and oppression. In short, Navajo millennialism has been conceived of in terms of games throughout its history. I would add that unrestrained gambling is a Monstrous act: those who exaggerate are no longer Alive but Dead.

From the Point of View of the Dead: the Lakota 'Sun Dance'

Around midsummer, when people assembled for the common buffalo hunt during the 'moon of the ripening chokecherries', Lakota and Dakota people

performed their so-called sun dance.²⁵ Whereas they habitually camped dispersed in the woods, at that occasion they all gathered on higher ground and set up their tipis in a huge circle, sometimes as large as a mile in diameter. One of the first things to do was to locate an appropriate cottonwood tree. This tree was treated as an enemy to be subdued; mounted warriors rushed it, counting coup on it. After a pipe had been offered to the tree, it was 'chopped to death'—i.e. it was axed. This was usually done by 'buffalo maidens', young girls painted and dressed in red. At that point, relatives of the girls gave away ponies, woven blankets, and other precious goods. On the mournful tunes of songs for fallen warriors, the 'captive' was brought to the camp in procession; those carrying it would occasionally stop, howling like wolves or coyotes. The pole was then painted in red, blue, green, and yellow—each colour corresponding to one of the cardinal directions. A reddened calfskin banner, buffalo tallow, and little bags of tobacco were attached to it, as well as cherry branches forming the 'nest of the thunderbird'. When the pole was finally erected in the centre of the camp, men and women would tease each other and joke raunchily, something that was normally considered unthinkable—sexual restrictions were temporarily suspended. In the evening, people dressed up in their finest clothes and performed all kinds of dances during which they incarnated buffalos, thunderbirds, and much more.

Actually, a perplexing variety of rites were going on simultaneously throughout the sun dance. People went into sweat lodges, children had their ears pierced, the deceased were attended in ghost-keeping feasts, and clowns engaged in buffoonery and all sorts of games. Extraordinary meals were also prepared: for example, puppies were painted blue, suffocated, boiled, and eaten. The grounds around the pole were marked by the aroma of burnt sage and tobacco. Some men, who had made a vow, had retreated in a special tipi. On the morning of the final day, they appeared during a sham battle in which they were 'captured' by being thrown to the ground. The flesh of the 'captives' was then pierced. Wooden skewers were put in their breasts or shoulder blades. The skewers were attached to rawhide ropes and tied to the cottonwood pole. Alternatively, they were fastened with thongs to one or more buffalo skulls that the captive had to drag around the dance area. The sun dance proper started when all of them had been secured to the pole. The captives wore necklaces with rawhide disks representing sunflowers and elaborate headdresses ornamented with porcupine quills. Sagebrush was wound around their wrists. They danced and gazed into the sun the entire day, without drinking or eating. On the rhythms of a drum and encouraged by the rattling and singing of the spectators, they bobbed up and down in a line, blowing on their eagle-bone whistles. To make their ordeal even more severe *heyoka* clowns danced backwards around the circle, holding water and food in front of them. Sometimes, a spectator stepped forward, tearing a bit of flesh from his or her arm. As this was going on, relatives of the dancers were supposed to demonstrate extreme generosity by giving away their most valued

possessions. The dancers themselves began slowly but gradually to work themselves into a frenzy, until they finally tore the skewers from their bodies. On that climactic note, the sun dance ended.

The entire ritual is a metamorphosis whereby the Living turn into the Dead—given its all-encompassing character, one could speak of a major catastrophe. Those who participate are no longer Humans but all sorts of Monsters and Beasts: Wolves, Thunderbirds, Buffalos, Clowns, Warriors, etc. What Lakota view as a cottonwood tree is perceived as an enemy from the Warriors' perspective. What Lakota view as 'axing the trunk', the Buffalos see as 'finishing off the adversary'. Such Monsters and Beasts may be animate, but they are Dead at the same time. The red body-coverings, characteristic of those who are in mourning, are not coincidental. Sweating, buffoonery, and eating puppies are contrary efforts; those who engage in them are not Human. The sage and the tobacco indicate that the dancers are no longer Alive. As to the final dance, I suggest that the spectators who surround the cottonwood pole temporarily change shape into a hoop of Stars (remember that the deceased are identified with stars in the sky). From their viewpoint, i.e. the viewpoint of the Dead, the dancers who attach themselves to the pole with skewers are Eagles or Thunderbirds. Taken as a whole, however, they are the Sun. The thesis is admittedly speculative, but it is supported by what one man explained to Bornali Halder: 'The [Pleiades], Orion, Sirius, [Gemini], the Twins and Capella make a star hoop in the sky, [which] lines up with the sundance grounds . . . The sun will sit in the middle of that circle on June 21st—the summer solstice— . . . and it will be in direct alignment with the sundance grounds'.²⁶

The Northern Pacific Rim—From the Point of View of the Dead: the Yup'ik 'Bladder Festival'

Until fall, Yup'ik people would live dispersed over the tundra, preoccupied with all kinds of harvesting activities. After freeze-up, however, they gathered in winter villages; this was the beginning of the ceremonial season. One of the major events was the so-called bladder festival.²⁷ During this ritual, dead humans and sea mammals were invited into the village, feasted and hosted, and finally sent away again.²⁸ The name of the festival derives from the idea that each prey specimen has a 'person', which retracts to the bladder when it is hunted down.²⁹ Each year, at the time of the winter solstice, people inflated the bladders of all mammals captured that year and brought them into the communal men's house, where they were treated as honoured guests. Failing to supply the needs of the guests was feared to invite disaster: the seals would not come back the next year and starvation would plague the village. To avoid such misfortune the use of sharp implements of any kind was forbidden. Cutting something during the bladder festival amounted to interrupting the pathway of the seals and to cutting off one's future catch.

At the beginning of the festival, the men painted the bodies of the children with charcoal and white clay and took them to the edge of the village, where they entered each woman's house in turn. The naked children sang songs and behaved like dogs, howling, grunting, and stamping their feet. The hostesses fumigated their houses, which were brightly lit, with the smoke of wild celery and Labrador tea. They gave the boisterous guests fresh water and filled their bowls with all kinds of delicacies.³⁰ Ann Fienup-Riordan points out that this reversed the usual course of events in many ways: 'Instead of quiet, carefully covered women entering the communal men's house headfirst to take food to their men during the day, noisy, naked men and boys entered the individual sod houses backwards to take food from the women at night.'³¹ Indeed, to quote her again, 'the human community dramatically transformed itself into the antithesis of daily life.'³² The children/dogs were actually viewed as ancestors incarnate. That they walked around naked in freezing weather confirms their identification with the dead, who were deemed impervious to cold. And this whole practice is congruent with what happened at the feast for the dead, where people let their dogs devour the food presented to the deceased (it was believed that the dead had come as dogs).

Throughout the festival the participants feasted the inflated bladders as honoured guests. They offered them food and fresh water and pleased them with the aromatic smoke of wild celery. They also entertained them with all sorts of pantomimes, games, and masked dances. The dancers flapped, cried, burped, jumped, and howled, thus impersonating loons, swans, cranes, arctic foxes, wolverines, and much else. Young hunters danced as murrelets and eider ducks—that is, they assumed the form in which they would appear to the seals (cf. chapter four). On the last night, amidst loud singing and drumming, the seals made a dramatic entry: seal dancers emerged from the exit hole of the men's house, pretending to eat the women and children. The festival was concluded by sending the seals back. Young men took the bladders out through the central smoke-hole (the same route as the one taken by human corpses). They could not leave via the ordinary exit, for their pathway had to be separate from that of humans. As long as the bladders were inflated activities such as sewing or chopping were forbidden, for this would 'cut' the path of the seals and obstruct the return to their underwater home. Finally, the bladders were deflated and put down in holes in the ice. It was hoped that the seals would boast of their good treatment and allow the hunters to capture them the following spring.

The bladder festival must be understood as a catastrophe: it is a collective metamorphosis whereby all those who had been Alive die. All Humans change shape into Monsters and Beasts. Yup'ik turn into the Ancestors but also into Dogs, Seals, Swans, Eider Ducks, and so forth. As such, they are simultaneously animate and Dead. Not surprisingly, this different position entails a distinct perspective. From the point of view of the Dead, Seals and other Sea Mammals are perceived as Guests. What the Living experience

as famine and disaster is ‘treating one’s guests badly’ from the perspective of the Dead. What the Living view as using needles or knives becomes ‘barring one’s pathway’ from the viewpoint of the Dead. The fumigations with wild celery indicate the suspension of Humanity. Walking backwards and collecting food at night in the sod houses are obviously contrary efforts: those who engage in them are no longer Yup’ik. What Humans perceive as freezing cold, Beasts experience as unbearably hot—that is why the men and boys behave as dogs and run around naked. In the end, the whole festival can be grasped as a vivid demonstration of how sea hunting is perceived from a Seal’s perspective, namely as visiting a feast and enjoying the company of a generous Host. What the Living would conceive of as a confrontation between hunter and prey, the Dead view as an encounter between host and guest.

Hospitality and Destruction: the Ainu ‘Bear Festival’ from Different Perspectives

Ainu people treat bears and fish owls with considerable deference, for they are considered to be Visitors from the *kamuy* world. Such ‘respected guests’ used to be captured alive and were reared in the house; as Shigeki Akino describes: ‘As an honoured guest, a bear was given loving care by its hosts, who treated it as a member of the family. As a cub it was brought into the house, fed like a human infant, [and even given its own toys]’.³³ Eventually, the bear was ‘sent off’ in an elaborate festival, to rejoin his fellow *kamuy* in the mountains.³⁴ Raccoon dogs and foxes, envisaged as ‘the bear’s servants’, received similar treatment. In fact, all creatures hunted on land and at sea were given basic sending ceremonies. In what follows, I have a closer look at the sending ceremony par excellence, the bear festival.³⁵

At the end of the winter, hunters would capture a bear cub, usually shortly after emerging from its den. It was brought home, where it was well fed and treated with the utmost courtesy. According to Joseph M. Kitagawa, the young bear was ‘nursed by an Ainu woman as if it were a human baby’.³⁶ When the Visitor had become too big, it was put in a cage situated behind the east window of the house; but even so the bear was continuously pampered and spoiled. Then, usually at the beginning of autumn, it was time for the bear to return to its mountain abode (bears were seen as *kamuy* from the mountains—literally Mountain Visitors).

At the festival, the young bear was offered millet cakes, dumplings, and saké, just like the human guests who sometimes came from faraway villages. Shaved willow sticks (*inaw*) and ceremonial arrows were crafted—these were gifts to be taken away by the bear. Japanese lacquer-ware, swords, and other items that connote wealth were also offered to the Visitor.³⁷ The festival host would address him/her as follows: ‘You are now grown up; it is time for you to go back to your father and mother. You shall have a lot of souvenirs, with which your parents will be greatly delighted. Go back

straight and quick!³⁸ And the aged spoke to the bear in a special tongue, known as the ‘language of the *kamuy*’.³⁹ Then, a dance was performed in front of the cage and the participants, who had donned their finest clothing and adornments, feasted until dawn. It was an extremely joyful occasion. Prominent men wore crown-like headdresses not only depicting bears, but also killer whales, wolves, and fish owls. Japanese swords (which the Ainu did not use as weapons) also formed part of their ceremonial outfit.⁴⁰ The songs that accompanied the dance suggested the roar of a bear; besides this bear dance people also performed crane dances, turtle dances, and much more.⁴¹ At some point, the bear was attached to a rope and pulled out of the cage. It was then led around the festival grounds for its ‘farewell walk’, upon which the mostly inebriated participants shot it with special, blunt arrows that were subsequently given to the departing Visitor as a souvenir. Eventually, the bear was strangled between two poles. After being skinned, its flesh was cooked and eaten by the festival participants. Its head was removed and the skull emptied. As this was going on, female participants would clap their hands and perform, as Kitagawa puts it, ‘a sort of pantomime dance, imitating at one time wild geese and swallows flapping their wings, or at other times snipes. As they danced in a circle, they sang: “I am a bird, and I can fly/ over the river and mountain/ I am a *kamuy*.”’⁴² Finally, the bear’s skull was placed on the V-shaped top of a pole decorated with shaved sticks, facing east. The ‘arrow of sending away’ was shot toward the eastern sky, signifying the Visitor’s departure.

Clearly, such sending off ceremonies entail a metamorphosis and a concomitant shift in perspective. Saké, shaved willow sticks, and Japanese paraphernalia are markers of Monstrosity. Those who dance and speak in a special tongue are no longer *ainu* but *kamuy*, no longer Humans but Monsters or Beasts: Mountain Visitors or Bears, Sea Visitors or Killer Whales, Cranes, Turtles, Geese, and so forth. The breastfeeding of the bear cub already foreshadows that collective change of shapes: the wet nurse perceives it as a human baby, suggesting she has adopted a similar position—strictly speaking she is not Ainu but Bear. Comparable shifts of perspective take place during the festival proper. What Humans would view as a bear or a fish owl becomes a distinguished guest from the perspective of Monsters. Those who act as hosts must have adopted the same position—that is, they are not Ainu but Bears or Fish Owls. That they wear outfits that are reminiscent of such creatures is not by accident. In any case, this altered position elucidates their joyful demeanour. What Monsters view as a happy occasion, namely the return of a guest to his parents, would be perceived as the slaughtering of a bear from a Human point of view. What the former see as hospitality, the latter see as destruction. At the end of the festival, the perspective shifts back to normal: the bear is no longer seen as Guest (inedible) but as Prey (edible). The eating of the bear’s meat is an indication that the participants have regained their Humanity. In more general terms, the Dead have come back to Life; the catastrophe has been overcome.

Southern Asia—Flash-floods and Thunderstorms as Music Feasts

‘The fear of thunder, lightning, heavy winds, and the accompanying catastrophe of flooding’, Signe Howell observes, ‘is prominent among many Orang Asli groups’.⁴³ Indeed, thunderstorms and flash-floods are the worst that can happen in Batek and Chewong animism. Frequently blowing up in the late afternoon, thunderstorms are especially dangerous. As the forest soil contains few nutrients, the roots of the trees are not very deep and this makes them extremely vulnerable to collapse.⁴⁴ Kirk Endicott writes:

The heavy downpour of rain can loosen the roots of the shallow-rooted rainforest trees, and the sudden gusts of wind can blow down large branches and can topple even the largest of trees. During thunderstorms, the Batek stand nervously at the fronts of their shelters, holding their children and their most prized possessions, watching the trees. With each gust of wind, the trees groan and crack. The air is filled with shouts of warning, and families rush from one shelter to another.⁴⁵

This panicky excitement is understandable, given that giant trees are often heard crashing to the ground; everybody realizes that if one of those were to tumble on a Batek camp it could easily kill all those present. Sudden, up-welling floods are equally feared. In fact, both types of disaster are associated and tend to take place simultaneously. If it storms violently and rains torrentially, flash-floods and accompanying landslides often occur in mountainous areas.⁴⁶

The floods are said to come from belowground and are the consequence of the movements of the Rainbow Dragon (*naga*) who, in Batek animism, lets the underground sea erupt through the skin of the earth. The wind and rain of thunderstorms are believed to originate in limestone pillars in the jungle, which are the abodes of the Master of Lightning (*gobar*).⁴⁷ Any kind of catastrophe is conceived of as a deliberate punishment of these two *hala*-beings, the ultimate Devourers; the Batek and the Chewong are unanimous on that point. The punishment is never gratuitous. They castigate in retaliation for the bad behaviour of people who failed to pay attention to certain taboos.⁴⁸ Here I shall not discuss these rather complex taboos in great depth. It suffices to give one example that I have already mentioned in a previous chapter. I refer to the prohibition on mocking wildlife. Chewong people insist that no forest creature whatsoever must be ridiculed.⁴⁹ The Batek are slightly more lenient: some would say that one can laugh at macaques for example, but only a little bit.⁵⁰ Why this is so is never specified, to the exasperation of many an ethnographer. Animists seem to take a malign pleasure in remaining vague about the topic. All they say is that the transgressors cause the up-welling of subterranean water and eventually drown, swallowed by the Rainbow Dragon. Alternatively, the offenders are crushed by falling trees. That is, they are killed by the Master of Lightning.

Howell reports that a few years before her arrival a terrible storm arose during which three people died because of a toppled tree. The survivors told her that the victims had made the mistake of mocking worms.⁵¹

Various strategies are used to avoid being struck by disaster. In the literature, the most prominent one is referred to as the 'blood sacrifice'—people intend to stop the storm or flood by means of bloodlettings, which are forbidden in ordinary circumstances.⁵² When a thunderstorm passes directly over a camp, they would utter spells and burn incense.⁵³ Somebody with esoteric knowledge may run out into the rain and shout upwards into the storm, begging the Master of Lightning or his avatars not to come too close. Others would prepare a pot of incense for blowing smoke in various directions away from themselves, thus providing the approaching Devourers an alternative path. When flooding is extremely severe or goes on too long, music may be performed; on such occasions the singers and dancers decorate their bodies with flowers and don particular costumes. This gives them the appearance of Devourers in their human form.⁵⁴ A shaman might try to appease the Rainbow Dragon by offering her a piece of bamboo, which she perceives as a bush knife, a valuable item because she cannot obtain it in her own world.⁵⁵

Obviously, floods and thunderstorms are metamorphoses. Those struck by them are no longer Humans but Monsters; they transform from Batek into Devourers, that is, into avatars of the Rainbow Dragon and the Master of Lightning. As such, the victims are no longer Alive but Dead. Mocking wildlife is a contrary effort: those who cannot resist doing it change shape; they are no longer Alive but Dead—hence the expectation that mockers will be crushed or drowned. The bloodlettings and other remedies are also contrary efforts. Those who burn incense and adorn themselves with flowers no longer pertain to the Living; as Monsters they may be animate but they are also Dead. The animistic adage that in order to deal with a catastrophe one has to let it take place as catastrophically as possible is confirmed once again. In the end, everything depends on the perspective and on how it is manipulated. Just as they view an ordinary piece of bamboo as a valuable iron tool, Monsters perceive disasters as feasts of music and dance.

Cyclones and the Gathering of Honey

Each year strong cyclonic conditions develop near the Andaman Islands. Turtles migrate elsewhere and sea hunting is suspended. Ongee women now frequently complain about their men's laziness. Whereas they themselves work hard to gather food, the men obstinately carve wooden phalluses—they have started to 'remember honey'.⁵⁶ At this time of the year waves can rise up to seven metres and all along the coastline they cause great damage.⁵⁷ Camps located near tidal creeks and mangrove forests are deserted, while the Ongees move to shelters in the interior forest. This translocation takes place at full moon, that is, in a night of high tide when turbulent

sea water rushes into the creeks. It is literally a night of destruction: 'The madly racing and rising sea water rips apart all that grows on the coastal area.'⁵⁸ As water levels rise, women dismantle the shelters. Sitting around a fire, men and boys clasp their wooden phalluses and sing until daybreak. Eventually, men and women gather on the central ground of the demolished camp. Marching in a single-file formation, they impersonate crabs, frogs, turtles, pigs. In a comical way, everybody replicates the specific movements of some creature. At the end dancers incarnate lizards and felines:

The last few moments of going round the [former camp] depicts the highly stylized, slow, and deliberate movement pattern of the monitor lizard and the civet cat. Those who imitate the monitor lizard bend over completely and walk on all fours. As the 'lizards' move about, the 'cats' behind them and ahead of them stop to create more space between themselves and the 'lizards'. In contrast to the earlier movements, and to the movement of the monitor lizards, the cats move with greater agility but alternate between standing still and walking behind the lizards.⁵⁹

The ceremonial event ends with the wooden phalluses being thrown into the sea. In this manner the wind-spirits or Absorbers (*tomya*) are deliberately 'offended', upon which they leave the island; a lull in the rainstorm usually occurs soon thereafter. People go away from the coast to set up shelters in the forest, where trees are now loaded with honeycombs. The season of gathering honey and fruits has begun. For a number of weeks, only these very peculiar foods (that do not require mastication) will be consumed. The forest is envisaged as 'dry' at that stage; the sea has no turtles worth eating and pigs are still too young.⁶⁰ Honey gathering is undertaken with considerable enthusiasm, although it is also conceived of as a grave offence: the activity deprives the jawless Absorbers of their prime food. In the words of one Ongee man: 'by eating all the honey in the forest after we have made the rains and wind along with the [Absorbers] go away the [Absorbers] are angry, offended, and we can expect them to come down again full of anger and hunger, filling up our space with wetness and winds'.⁶¹ At the end of the honey season the forest indeed turns 'all wet'.⁶² Just before returning to the coast the honey gatherers behave in a remarkable way. Men go hunting pigs, but without using clay paint and fire as they usually do. Women attach swings to branches and use them enthusiastically, thus becoming 'like wind'. That is, everybody purposefully 'leaves smell', something that is normally avoided at all cost. Such acts promote the Absorbers' return; their arrival is marked by a short spell of turbulent weather and the occasional appearance of water spouts.⁶³

Cyclones, I suggest, can be understood as metamorphoses. When the sea becomes turbulent Ongees turn into Crabs, Frogs, Monitor Lizards, Civet Cats, and so forth. In more general terms, Humans change into Beasts. Seen

in this light, it is not surprising that various myths relate how the ancestors were overwhelmed by a great catastrophe, upon which they transformed into all sorts of creatures of the forest and the sea.⁶⁴ Carving wooden phal-luses and gathering honey are contrary efforts: those who engage in them are no longer Alive but Dead. The key metamorphosis is that from Ongees into Absorbers during the calmer period when people have moved away from the coast: the honey gatherers are not Humans but Monsters. Just like the jawless Absorbers, they do not masticate—this temporary refusal to chew is yet another contrary effort, an indication of their Monstrosity. Deliberately emitting smell, whether by swinging or hunting without clay paint, is becoming wind-like: these are just alternative manifestations of the same thing, namely Ongees turning into Absorbers. What Ongees perceive as the Absorbers leaving the island, the Absorbers themselves view as setting up shelter in the interior. What is sea from one point of view becomes forest from another. Indeed, the whole episode is characterised by a confusion of perspectives. What is experienced as a cyclone from a Human perspective is nothing else than the collection of honey and fruit from that of a Monster. Once again, we notice that Humanity and Monstrosity—Life and Death—are positional qualities.

Eastern Africa—Rainstorms and Ebony Rites

In Uduk animism, the standard response to epidemics, excessive rain, storms, and other sorts of disaster is to ‘sit black’. In order to escape further damage, those who are affected anoint their bodies with blackened sesame oil. Wendy James mentions that ‘black, burnt sesame is even thrown into a rainstorm to protect the village from its worst effects.’⁶⁵ In particularly dire circumstances, the help of experts may be sought. This section will focus on those specialized in battling the *arum* powers of the wild and the dead: the so-called ebony diviners. Intriguingly, such diviners are identified with the very forces they are supposed to fight. They are referred to as ‘wild creatures’ and especially as clawed creatures such as the lion or the leopard. Sometimes they are conceived of as monkeys, elephants, ebony throwing-sticks, or man-eating rainbows, all emblems of the world beyond the home. Apparently they can be associated with any bush creature, except those that are hoofed (ungulates are linked to the masters of the horn, as we have seen). This ‘wildness’ comes to the fore most clearly during the initiation rites for novice diviners.⁶⁶ For example, James describes the following scene:

The principals and women of the beer sit in a row on the ‘left hand’ of the hut . . . ‘they are Elephants’. Then they all line up . . . each person with his or her left hand on the back of the person in front. Water is sloshed over all of them, and each vigorously washes the one in front, with the same hand. They all walk forward and back, still in line,

trampling the ground 'like elephants', while the women watching ululate. Water is poured over them continuously, so that the trampling of all the feet makes a lot of mud, 'like elephants'.⁶⁷

Perhaps not coincidentally, the Uduk word for 'mud' is the same as that for 'elephant'. An ever recurring theme at such occasions is the temporary death of the initiates. Senior diviners whip or slap them with ebony throwing-sticks, upon which they are struck down. Sometimes they are killed by means of a certain medicine. James gives the following example: 'A senior Monkey . . . circles watchfully round the lines in monkey fashion, pauses, gathers speed and dashes suddenly down the line, spitting [rainbow medicine] in all the boys' faces. The women ululate and the apprentices fall back like ninepins.'⁶⁸ Eventually, the novices revive and there follows a great deal of singing, dancing, and beer drinking. In the end, they are decorated with beads and covered with red ochre.

In Uduk animism, people deal with all kinds of disasters by actively creating a disaster themselves. 'Sitting black' and throwing burnt sesame are contrary efforts: rather than a means to escape the catastrophe, they highlight it. The rationale appears to be that in order to deal with something terrible, one is obliged to adopt a similar position; hence a metamorphosis from the Living into the Dead. The ebony diviners are no longer *wathim pa* but *arum*, no longer Uduk but Clawed Ones, no longer Humans but Beasts. As Lions or Leopards, they are animate and Dead at the same time. The same goes for those participating in the initiation rites: the women of the beer change shape into Elephants, the principals into Monkeys. That the initiates themselves are 'killed' is only logical—more precisely, they are no longer Alive but Dead. The ebony diviners 'strive with their privileged knowledge to protect the community from invasion by the powers of the wild, or the dead', James notes, but they do this by appropriating those powers rather than by distancing themselves from them.⁶⁹ Initiations and other ebony rites are indeed pocket catastrophes, occasions where the Wild and the Dead override everything else. Covering oneself with beads and red ochre marks the eventual return to Life.

When an Ox Is Suffocated

Occasionally, Maa herders sacrifice cattle. More precisely, they ritually suffocate it. This only takes place in two kinds of circumstances: at age-set ceremonies or in times of catastrophe.⁷⁰ In fact, these circumstances are often made to coincide deliberately. Thus, when the Maasai and the Samburu were struck by what is remembered as the 'great disaster' (*mutai*), a series of droughts, wars, famines, and livestock epidemics in the 1890s, they organized festivals during which their *moran* or warriors came to foreground.⁷¹ The prominence of the latter at times of crisis is related to their predatory qualities:

[W]hen stock has strayed or are threatened by a predator; when discipline breaks down among thirsty herds at a water-point; when some epidemic is spread through an area by the movements of cattle; or when drought sets in and hunger prevails. At such times, there is a switch from husbandry to predation only in the sense that an uncompromising response is necessary to meet the predation of nature itself. It is the most active young men who hold the front line against crisis.⁷²

In periods of turmoil, there was a switch from peaceful husbandry to predatory raiding. In Maasai animism, this change of conduct is highlighted during one particular age-set festival revolving around the suffocation of an ox. Some years after their initiation, the entire *moran* age-group would assemble in one spot to celebrate that festival, which Paul Spencer describes as the climax of warrior-hood.⁷³ Their heads covered with red ochre, warriors appeared in full regalia, wearing black calfskin capes, thigh-bells, brass ear-rings, and ostrich-feather or lion-skin headdresses. Carrying spears, shields, and flags, they moved on the rhythms of their lion dance. Sometimes their fire-stick patrons halted the procession, at which point 'the dancing would intensify and minor epidemics of shaking broke out: a yelp, some shaking, and then more yelps and more shaking'.⁷⁴ The fire-stick patrons used whips and at times they treated the warriors 'as though they were frisky cattle'.⁷⁵ Among the most critical events of the festival were the coercive appointment of 'the-man-who-is-erected' or 'the-man-who-is-planted-upright' and the suffocation of his ox, that is, an ox that a prophet had selected for its propitious markings.

The event took place in the forest, always near a strangler fig tree. As usual on such occasions, the patrons kindled the fire where the ox would be roasted with their sticks. All the warriors assembled near the tree and there would be a great deal of singing. The ox was given mead (a beverage brewed with honey) and eventually suffocated with a woman's apron. Spencer points out that the man-who-is-planted-upright is envisaged as the mainstay in the transition towards elder-hood.⁷⁶ Sacrificing his ox is tantamount to 'erecting' him and, through him, his entire age-group. That everything takes place near a strangler fig which towers above the forest is not accidental. Not only are such distinctive trees with their numerous aerial roots very impressive, they also provide the fire-sticks that are the quintessential regalia of the warriors' patrons. The following observation is worth considering:

[The strangler fig tree] originates in an ivy-like growth, which climbs up a well grown tree of another species, the shoot sending out stalks and roots until its support is completely surrounded. The various stalks then all coalesce, and the bark unites into one piece, the irregularities of which disappear after a few years, leaving a perfectly smooth surface. No sign of the supporting tree is visible with the exception of its

crest, which rises from the middle of the [strangler fig]. About fifty or sixty feet from the ground the [strangler fig] throws out large branches, which support both their own weight and that of the heavy foliage and fruit they bear. Eventually the original tree is completely swallowed up, and its usurper represents the only indication that it has ever existed.⁷⁷

‘There is a neat parallel’, Spencer concludes, ‘between the notion of a vulnerable creeper with no substantial roots that smothers its host as it acquires strength and longevity, and the heavy dependence of the age-group of *moran* on their unfortunate ritual leader [who is “erected” and acts as the principal stake]’.⁷⁸ The man-who-is-planted-upright was indeed cursed; just like the host-tree which is suffocated by the parasite, Maasai herders contend that he is bound to be struck by misfortune and will die sooner than his former *moran* age-mates. Evidently, that is why warriors were so reluctant to volunteer for this task. In any case, those who were chosen were obliged to adopt a way of life that epitomises elder-hood and its associated docility. ‘By becoming an elder’, Spencer remarks, ‘he makes the elder-hood of all other *moran* more credible and imminent’.⁷⁹ The warriors themselves would eventually be smeared with substances such as milk, butter, and fat from the sacrificed ox. They were addressed as ‘cattle-of-the-country’, to which they responded by acting as such.⁸⁰ Finally, they would strip, decorate their bodies with red ochre or white chalk, and perform various war dances. In pre-colonial times, the festival allegedly used to be concluded with a flamboyant raid against some enemy of the Maasai.⁸¹ The transition from warrior to elder was brought to a close by shaving off the braided hair which the *moran* had grown over many years.⁸²

Previously, I showed that the *moran* or Warriors are not Humans but Monsters or Beasts, at least from the perspective of the elders. Predation and cattle raiding are contrary efforts, just as drinking mead and performing lion dances—to consume honey is to become Dorobo-like (cf. chapter two), to dance is to shift into a Lion. Those who engage in such activities are no longer Alive—they may be animate, but they are also Dead. During the age-set festival Life is suspended; it is a catastrophe of sorts. Braided hair, red ochre, calfskin capes, ostrich feathers, and all the other regalia are markers of Death. The cattle and the strangler fig tree are alternative manifestations of the same thing. The *moran* assume the shape of Cattle but, taken as a whole, they become a Fig Tree. In a similar vein, the man-who-is-planted-upright is identified with the Ox and with the Stake or Host Tree. That both ox and stake are suffocated is not accidental. However, that should not be interpreted as a ‘killing’ for one cannot kill what is already Dead. To the contrary, the suffocation is an act of resuscitation rather than one of destruction: strictly speaking, the ox is made Alive. Of course, everything depends on the perspective. From a Human point of view the ox may be smothered, but from that of the motley crew of Monsters present at the age-set festival it is revived. That is what Maasai festival

participants mean when they say that the stake is 'erected'. Ultimately, the *morán* are revived too. The transition to elder-hood is essentially a return to the Living: Warriors turn into Maasai, Monsters metamorphose into Humans. We see, once again, that Life and Death can only be grasped as positional qualities.

EVOLUTION AND METAMORPHOSIS

In his justly celebrated 1909 monograph, *Les Rites de Passage: Etude systématique des rites*, Arnold van Gennep has written that dance, music, and intoxication put those who participate in rituals in 'a special state'.⁸³ The present chapter identifies that state as Death. Engaging in rituals of transition implies a change of shape whereby the Living turn into the Dead. We can thus appreciate the true extent of Philippe Descola's conclusion that animism is founded on 'a positional ontology, wherein it is always difficult to attribute stable identities to the entities one encounters'.⁸⁴ Both Life and Death must indeed be grasped as positions rather than as stable categories. It has been established that the capacity for metamorphosis is not the privilege of shamans or any kind of expert. The evidence I have presented indicates that Chachi weddings, Lakota sun dances, Ainu bear festivals, and many so-called rites of passage are occasions where Life is temporarily suspended. In that sense, they are all catastrophes. This insight provides an important clue as to why animistic peoples all over the world put so much emphasis on disaster. In contrast to the modern scientific concept of life, which is based on the idea of gradual change (evolution), the animistic Life is premised on periodic annihilation (catastrophe). In sum, it emerges that the Darwinian doctrine that is so central to the Western cosmology is premised on the a priori assumption of continuity. In itself, this doctrine is not more advanced or truer than any framework based on the assumption of discontinuity. In principle, both possibilities are equally plausible; the former is not inherently more sophisticated than the latter. Whether one adopts a philosophy of evolution or one of metamorphosis is ultimately a matter of choice or taste rather than an unavoidable necessity.

Conclusion

So there is an expanded Death that recurs in many—if not all—forms of animism. From a bird's eye perspective, it is the default position. In Chachi animism, Blacks and other Hispanics living downstream and Whites living in cities are Dead. Monkeys, peccaries, wildcats, and all those inhabiting the forest are Dead too. And so are the dolphins, sea turtles, and other creatures of the ocean. All these beings may be animate, but they are Dead at the same time. Only people like us—Chachi—are Alive. Only animals that have been raised and nourished like us—our pets—are Alive. In this configuration Life is restricted because it always requires a specific effort—it ceaselessly has to be 'polished like a canoe', as a Chachi friend explained it one day. The essence of this Life is that it has to be made and remade perpetually. In the Chachi case this process of continuous fabrication is very much focussed on maintaining a monogamous lifestyle and on being a worthy hunter and canoe crafter, as we have seen in some detail. In other cases, the emphasis lies on adorning oneself correctly, on speaking and behaving beautifully, on keeping one's smell and protecting oneself from the winds, or on weeding and brewing beer. Yet Life is not only restricted but also fundamentally open. Anybody could be included, provided that the right effort is put in. In other words, anybody can be made Alive. That is what ethnographers have occasionally described when they speak of the taming of captured forest animals, the ritual adoption of enemies, or the cultivation of—say—White trading partners. From the broad comparative perspective developed in this book, it emerges that these are not exceptional quirks or ethnographic oddities but astonishingly stable characteristics of most forms of animism across the world. They are, in the terms of Philippe Descola, invariants and they recur not only in the Americas but also in Asia and Africa.

Crucially, Life and Death are positional qualities—they are not inherent properties of things. From their respective point of view, Blacks, Whites, monkeys, or turtles are Alive whereas Chachi are Dead; that is why the howler monkey Armando and I were hunting one day perceived us as ghosts, for example. That is also why the bear cubs the Ainu used to strangle ceremonially experience their ordeal as a happy occasion: from

their point of view, they are not killed but welcomed by their parents, to whom they return. Depending on the perspective, we are dealing with a journey into Death or with a return to Life. By taking up the position of an outsider or an animal one temporarily dies. As we have seen, this is what happens during shamanic curing sessions, hunting, funerals, and various kinds of rituals—all of these must be grasped as instances of metamorphosis. They always imply a shift from the Living into the Dead or vice versa. That is why shamans, hunters, or mourners rarely if ever shape-change into domestic animals: one can only metamorphose into something that is *totally* different. If you are Alive, you cannot transform into something that is also Alive; if you are Dead, you cannot transform into something that is Dead too. Navajo curers may become coyotes and Navajo hunters deer, but neither of them ever metamorphoses into sheep. Uduk shape-shifters may become antelopes or leopards, but they never turn into goats or cattle. Within animism, Life can always be suspended—it is conceived of as a discontinuity. To die is not necessarily something of the utmost importance and it is certainly not limited to the very end of any given individual's life-course. Wari' raiders, Lakota medicine men, Yup'ik whalers, Batek fruit gatherers and honey collectors, and Maasai lion dancers all have died multiple times—journeying between the domain of Life and that of Death is actually part and parcel of their way of operating. Provided that one masters the appropriate ritual techniques, Life can be switched on and off so to speak.

What has transpired from this account of animism is that contemporary scientists pose the question of life in a very distinctive way. Biologists seek the governing principle of life at the microscopic level nowadays—hence the overwhelming prominence of such disciplines as genetics. And life is conceived of as continuous by default, as testified by the current obsession with evolutionary perspectives. These conventions are key aspects of what I have referred to as the modern Western cosmology. But there is nothing ineluctable about this specific way of framing the question of life—it is in fact premised on an unacknowledged choice. That is not to say that the modern cosmology is 'wrong' or that its biology can be disproven. At most, one could say that its adherents have a skewed idea of their own—supposedly unique—ability to discover the 'deeper truths' of life. I have demonstrated that viewing life as essentially macroscopic rather than microscopic or as discontinuous rather than continuous is not in any way less factual or realistic. Life in perpetual maintenance, visible to the naked eye of its Chachi or Yup'ik beholders, is not in any way less truthful than biological conceptions of life based on the intricate workings of genes and cells. Whatever the Watsons and the Cricks of this world may proclaim, nothing proves that the skilled canoe crafter or the successful seal hunter is a less suitable basis for grasping life than the gene or the cell. Positing a Life that works in terms of metamorphosis is not less reasonable than understanding life as a process of gradual evolution. Ultimately, Life as envisaged within

animism is on a par with life as conceived of within modern biology. Nothing actually supports the conviction that there is an absolute distinction between the two, as between fetish and fact.

The surprisingly limited scope of the contemporary life sciences has become apparent. The Uduk beer brewer, the Ongee turtle hunter, or the Ainu fisherman are not less equipped to tackle the question of life than the user of sophisticated microscopes, the manipulator of DNA, or the evolutionary theorist. There is no qualitative difference between these respective pathways—the former are not more distorted than the latter. Would it be exaggerated to say that the widespread scientific belief that there is a ‘deeper’ level of reality that is only accessible through (typically) expensive, high-tech devices is an instance of intellectual colonialism? Adherents of the modern cosmology certainly tend to imagine life as an independent reality, a supremely complex but (at least in principle) fully apprehensible ensemble of facts—life science is accordingly seen as an accumulative enterprise of ever increasing perfection. What the present study has revealed, by contrast, is their naïvety. For it is indeed naïve to think that questioners—whether geneticists or Chachi canoe crafters, cell biologists or Yup’ik seal hunters—can avoid shaping the question in their own, idiosyncratic ways. Life is not and has never been merely a topic waiting to be studied, independent of its inquirer. The exalted standing of the expert—the life scientist—has been demystified, whereas the number of those who are qualified to tackle the question of life has augmented significantly. In the end, the question itself has mutated (interestingly enough, similar mutations appear to occur in newly emerging fields such as astrobiology but going into this here would lead us too far). The point is no longer to discern fact from artefact, or nature from culture. The search for absolute biological truth, which the more zealous adherents of the Western cosmology have staged so grandiosely in the past few centuries, has shrunk to its true proportion: that of a (in some ways) magnificent but nevertheless quite parochial enterprise. Whatever its past successes, this conception of science may no longer be fit for purpose. What looms on the horizon—one could hope—is a less monotonous and more inclusive way of doing science and a less docile way of addressing the question of life.

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Notes

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

1. Tylor (2010a [1871]: 258).
2. Tylor (2010a [1871]: 260).
3. Descola (2005: 51).
4. E.g. Humphrey and Thomas (1996: 1–4).
5. Tylor (2010a [1871]: 48).
6. Gayon (2010, *passim*).
7. Morange (2008: ix–x).
8. Cf. Schneider (2002: 183).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. Lévi-Strauss (1952: 20–1; 1962: 220); cf. Praet (2013b).
2. Viveiros de Castro (2009: 24, footnote).
3. Cf. Praet (2006, 2009a).
4. Viveiros de Castro (2006: 560, my abbreviation); cf. Viveiros de Castro (1979).
5. Conklin (2001: 24, 181); Vilaça (2006: 55).
6. Vilaça (2006: 162) translates it in Portuguese as *gente verdadeiro*.
7. Conklin (2001: 29); Vilaça (2006: 62).
8. Vilaça (2006: 69, my translation).
9. Conklin (2001: 67, 89).
10. Vilaça (2006: 96).
11. Vilaça (2007: 174, my abbreviation).
12. Erikson (1996: 71–4).
13. Erikson (1996: 230).
14. Erikson (1996: 233).
15. Erikson (1996: 29–30, 179–81, 280–2).
16. Erikson (1996: 73).
17. Haile (1949: 88); cf. Witherspoon (1997: 96–7).
18. Cf. Reichard (1950: 23, 265).
19. Reichard (1950: 27, 36); Farella (1984: 20).
20. Reichard (1950: 252).
21. Witherspoon (1997: 23–5, 88); Kluckhohn and Leighton (1946: 220); cf. Kluckhohn (1949: 366–9).
22. Witherspoon (1997: 153).
23. Witherspoon (1997: 151).
24. Reed (1944: 147–9).

25. Witherspoon (1997: 61).
26. Witherspoon (1997: 79).
27. Witherspoon (1997: 80).
28. Reed (1944: 147).
29. Hassrick (1964: 6); DeMallie (2009: 189). According to DeMallie (2009: 191) the seven tribes of Lakotas were designated by the term *oyáte*, which he translates as 'people'.
30. DeMallie (2009: 190).
31. DeMallie (2009: 189–90).
32. DeMallie (2009: 189) draws this example from Walker (1982: 54–5).
33. DeMallie (2009: 190–1).
34. Halder (2002: 114).
35. DeMallie (2009: 191, 201).
36. Cf. Halder (2002: 110).
37. In the vernacular this is referred to as *mitaku'oyasin*, which Halder (2002: 94, 112) translates as 'we are all related' or 'the sacred hoop of life'.
38. Halder (2002: 111) uses a quote from Nicholas Black Elk, recorded in the 1930s.
39. Fienup-Riordan (1991: 39), (1994: 10).
40. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 53, 366–7).
41. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 366).
42. Fienup-Riordan (1991: inside cover).
43. Fienup-Riordan (1991: 130, my abbreviation).
44. Fienup-Riordan (1991: 207).
45. Kuzuno (1994: 4).
46. Katsuichi (2000: 11).
47. Katsuichi (2000: 13).
48. Munro (1963: 114); Watanabe (1994: 59).
49. Batchelor (1901: 89).
50. Ohnuki-Tierney (1999: 244).
51. Howell (2000: xix).
52. Walker (2006: 156).
53. Walker (2006: 105).
54. Howell (2000: xx).
55. Walker (2006: 111).
56. Endicott (1979: 53).
57. Howell (1984: 18).
58. Howell (1984: 13).
59. Radcliffe-Brown (1922: 12).
60. Pandya (2009: 5, 35, 109, 135).
61. This elementary insight is very well documented in Pandya's recent book (2009: 152–6).
62. Pandya (1993: 91).
63. Pandya (1993: 112).
64. Quoted by Pandya (1993: 94).
65. See Pandya (1993: 114–22, 122–35, 137–45) for fire, clay paint, and bones respectively.
66. Pandya (1993: 111).
67. Pandya (1993: 94).
68. Pandya (1993: 102); the vernacular term for 'heavy' is *amboro*.
69. Pandya (1993: 103, my abbreviation).
70. Pandya (2009: 56).
71. Pandya (1993: 100, 242).
72. James (1988: 90).

73. James (1979: 15–6, my abbreviation).
74. James (1979: 87).
75. Ibid.
76. James (1979: 90).
77. James (1979: 89–90).
78. James (1979: 96).
79. James (1988: 8).
80. The respective self-designations of the Samburu and the Maasai have been the subject of some controversy (Berntsen [1980: 2]; Jennings [2005: 220]). John Galaty (1982: 3) emphasizes that the term ‘Maasai’ embodies specific values and qualities accepted and manifested by all those who refer to themselves as such.
81. Spencer (1998: 28).
82. Spencer (1998: 16).
83. Spencer (1998: 30).
84. Spencer (1965: 81); for a more detailed account see Straight (2007: 29).
85. Spencer (1998: 10).
86. Spencer (1998: 35), emphasis in the original.
87. Spencer (1965).
88. Straight (2007: 21).
89. Spear and Waller (1993: 12).
90. Spear and Waller (1993: 13).
91. Foucault (1966, *passim*).
92. Viveiros de Castro (2006: 72, *passim*).
93. Viveiros de Castro (2006: 78).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. Cf. Altschuler (1964: 219–20).
2. E.g. Rivière (1994).
3. Vilaça (2006: 145–8).
4. Vilaça (2006: 148–50).
5. Vilaça (2006: 166–7).
6. Vilaça (2006: 166, my translation).
7. Vilaça (2006: 496).
8. Erikson (1996: 77–82).
9. Erikson (1996: 77).
10. Erikson (1996: 78).
11. Erikson (1996: 57–8).
12. Erikson (1996: 230).
13. Erikson (2004: 128).
14. Erikson (1996: 265–8).
15. Erikson (2004: 130).
16. Erikson (2004: 120, 139) translates the expression, *tsusin impak*, as ‘to become a spirit’ (*devenir esprit*).
17. Erikson (2004: 120–1).
18. *Astrocaryum murumuru* and *Bactris gasipaes*.
19. Erikson (2004: 125, my translation and abbreviation).
20. Witherspoon (1986: 119); a closely related vernacular concept is that of *naayée*, which is in effect usually translated as ‘monster’, Farella (1984: 8).
21. Witherspoon (1986: 64); Farella (1984: 76–83, 122, 130, 181, 186).
22. Cf. McPherson (2001: 158–78).
23. Mayor (2005: 122).

24. McPherson (2001: 159).
25. Witherspoon (1997: 182).
26. Ibid.
27. Halder (2002: 103, my abbreviation).
28. Ray (1945: 75).
29. That is how Fienup-Riordan (1994: 124) transcribes it. In Fitzhugh and Kaplan (1982: 184) these creatures are referred to as *tin-mi-ûk-pûk* or as *mû-tûgh-o-wik*.
30. Nelson (1900: 144–5).
31. Fienup-Riordan (1991, passim).
32. Fienup-Riordan (1991: 140).
33. Yamada (1994: 84–5).
34. Walker (2006: 218–20); cf. Fitzhugh and Dubreuil (1999: 327–34).
35. Cited in Walker (2006: 220).
36. Cited in Walker (2006: 219).
37. Batchelor (1901: 51–5).
38. Batchelor (1901: 324).
39. Howell (1984: 106–13); Endicott (1979: 208–10). There are various alternative expressions; for example, the Chewong also use the word *gob*, which often specifically refers to Malays.
40. Endicott (1979: 124).
41. Howell (1984: 164).
42. The specific vernacular terms are *gobar* and *naga*, what Endicott translates as ‘thunder-god’ and ‘earth deity’. Both are considered *hala*’ (Endicott 1979: 165–88). The corresponding Chewong terms are *tanko* and *naga* or, as Howell (1984: 80–5) renders it, the ‘superhuman being that causes thunder’ and the ‘original snake’.
43. Endicott (1979: 44).
44. Endicott (1979: 186).
45. Radcliffe-Brown (1922: 136–40); Pandya (1993: xvi).
46. Pandya (1993: 70).
47. Pandya (1993: 71).
48. Pandya (1993: 99, 282–3).
49. Pandya (1993: xx).
50. Pandya (1993: 46).
51. Pandya (1993: 282–3).
52. I refer to Radcliffe-Brown. According to Pandya (2009: 47) the exact expression used nowadays is *ineney lau*.
53. Radcliffe-Brown (1922: 138).
54. Pandya (2009: 38–9, 47, 58).
55. Pandya (2009: 248, 257–9).
56. Pandya (1993: 80).
57. James (1988: 8).
58. James (1988: 136).
59. James (1988: 36, 87).
60. *Damaliscus lunatus*; that particular Nuer group was called *tiang*, i.e. topi or ‘bastard hartebeest’.
61. James (1979: 46).
62. James (1979: 50, my abbreviation).
63. James (1979: 55).
64. James (1979: 57).
65. James (1979: 57, footnote).
66. Blackburn (1982: 290).
67. E.g. Spencer (1973: 206); Kenny (1981: 477, 488–9); Cronk (2002: 32); Galaty (1979: 805).

68. Kenny (1981: 478, my abbreviation).
69. Galaty (1979: *passim*).
70. Straight (2007: 107).
71. Galaty (1982: 5–7).
72. Kenny (1981: 485); Straight (2007: 20, 107–9).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. Cf. Descola (2005: 35).
2. Barrett (1925: 382).
3. Vilaça (2006: 193, 198–9, 497–8).
4. Vilaça (2006: 193).
5. Vilaça (2006: 497–8, my translation).
6. Vilaça (2006: 129).
7. Erikson (2001: 107).
8. Erikson (2001: 108).
9. Erikson (2001: 109).
10. Erikson (2001: 110).
11. Erikson (1996: 224).
12. Erikson (1996: 216).
13. Farella (1984: 76–7); cf. Witherspoon (1986: 87) and Reichard (1936: 67).
14. Reichard (1950: 183); cf. Hill (1938: 98–9).
15. Luckert (1975: 143, my abbreviation); cf. Hill (1938).
16. Luckert (1975: 141).
17. Cf. Luckert (1975: 108).
18. Walker (1991: 147–71).
19. Halder (2002: 121).
20. Halder (2002: 268).
21. Halder (2002: 125).
22. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 61).
23. Fitzhugh and Crowell (1988: 165).
24. Fitzhugh and Crowell (1988: 167).
25. Fitzhugh and Crowell (1988: 167–8).
26. See Turner (1993: 101).
27. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 104).
28. Lisiansky, cited in Lantis (1938: 442).
29. Lantis (1938: 443).
30. Walker (2006: 77–9).
31. Cf. Yamada (1994: 80).
32. Olschleger, in Fitzhugh and Dubreuil (1999: 210).
33. Iwasaki-Goodman and Nomoto, in Fitzhugh and Dubreuil (1999: 225).
34. Endicott (1979: 55–61).
35. Endicott (1979: 59, my abbreviations).
36. Howell (1984: 144).
37. Howell (1984: 164).
38. Cf. Blunt (1981) and Needham (1964).
39. Evans (1923: 203); Howell (1984: 181). As in the previous chapter, I translate *karei* or ‘thunder god’ as ‘Master of Lightning’ and *naga* or ‘earth snake’ as ‘Rainbow Dragon’.
40. Howell (1984: 181).
41. Pandya (1993: 92).
42. Pandya (1993: 118–9).
43. *Ibid.*
44. Pandya (1993: 93).

45. Pandya (2009: 255).
46. Radcliffe-Brown (1922: 218–9, 344, 350).
47. James (1988: 33).
48. James (1988: 44).
49. James (1988: 46).
50. James (1988: 44–6).
51. James (1979: 224).
52. Spencer (1988: 116, my abbreviation).
53. Magor (1994: 21).
54. Descola (2005: 35, my translation and abbreviation).
55. Descola (2005: 36, 40); Cf. Praet (2013a).
56. Descola (2005: 274, my translation and abbreviation).
57. Viveiros de Castro (2001: 19–44).
58. Rival (2012: 70); the scientific name of manioc is *Manihot esculenta*.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. Hubert and Mauss (1904: 86, my abbreviation).
2. Cf. Barrett (1925: 312); Altschuler (1964: 104–5).
3. Cf. chapter 6; see also Praet (2009b, 2011).
4. DeBoer (1998: 125).
5. Unidentified species; the shamans I knew were reluctant to share their botanical knowledge.
6. From Wilbert's (1979) study on the use of tobacco across South America and Erikson's (2006) edited volume on beer in Amazonia it can be inferred that this forms part of a much wider pattern.
7. I borrow the idea from Viveiros de Castro (1992: 271), who formulated it thus: 'Even if the object of the becoming is imaginary, the becoming is real, and the ferocious alterity is a quality of the verb, not its predicate'.
8. This idea was already expressed by Taylor (1997), Vilaça (1999: 249), and various others.
9. Vilaça (2006: 202).
10. Vilaça (1999: 249, my translation).
11. Vilaça (1999: 250).
12. Vilaça (2006: 203, my translation and abbreviation).
13. Vilaça (2006: 195, 203).
14. Vilaça (1999: 250, my translation).
15. Erikson (1996: 200).
16. Erikson (1996: 205–9).
17. Erikson (1996: 206, my translation).
18. Erikson (1996: 207, my translation).
19. They use the verb *nan-* which means 'to lose consciousness' but also 'to die' (Erikson [1996: 208]).
20. Witherspoon (1997: 19–24).
21. Luckert (1979).
22. Luckert (1979: 57).
23. Luckert (1979: 76).
24. Luckert (1979: 102).
25. Cf. Luckert (1979: 204–16).
26. Description based on Walker (1991: 241–55).
27. Walker (1991: 250, my abbreviation).
28. Walker (1991: 252).
29. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 14–7).

30. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 189).
31. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 200–1).
32. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 155–8).
33. Yup'ik seal hunters continued to use skin-covered kayaks into the 1950s, but today wooden and aluminium skiffs have replaced them.
34. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 130).
35. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 95).
36. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 264, 308).
37. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 61–2).
38. Walker (2006: 197).
39. Ohnuki-Tierney (1977: 248).
40. Batchelor (1901: 296–9). According to Batchelor, certain plants and trees are also seen in this way. Mentioning the example of the alder, he notes: 'strange as it may appear, the bark of this tree is not only looked upon as the *cause* of illness, but is also sometimes used as a *means* for its cure' (ibid.: 46, emphasis in original).
41. Ohnuki-Tierney (1973: 16–7).
42. Ohnuki-Tierney (1973: 22–3).
43. Endicott (1979: 128).
44. Endicott (1979: 145).
45. Endicott (1979: 133, 141).
46. Howell (1984: 160–1).
47. Howell (1984: 267–9).
48. Howell (1984: 163).
49. Pandya (1993: 102–3).
50. Pandya (2009: 7, 51).
51. Pandya (1993: 66).
52. The vernacular term is *torale*, which Pandya (1993: 109–11, 150) also translates as 'medicine man' or 'spirit-communicator'.
53. Pandya (1993: 64).
54. Radcliffe-Brown (1964: 306), Pandya (1993: 40).
55. Pandya (1993: 161–2).
56. James (1979: 222–5).
57. James (1979: 225).
58. James (1988: 8).
59. James (1988: 51–2).
60. James (1988: 52–4, my abbreviation).
61. James (1988: 55).
62. James (1988: 56).
63. Spencer (1973: 93).
64. Spencer (1988: 79).
65. Spencer (1965: 102).
66. Spencer (1988: 20).
67. Straight (2007: 30).
68. Spencer (1965: 125).
69. Spencer (1988: 120–1).
70. Spencer (1988: 121).
71. Spencer (1988: 122).
72. Spencer (1965: 263).
73. Eliade (1964: 36).
74. Hubert and Mauss (1904: 143).
75. The idea is prefigured by Hubert and Mauss (1904: 20) themselves, when they write: 'It would be wrong to think that, on the moment of performing a rite, the magician is in his normal state. Very often, it is precisely because he

is no longer in such a state that the rite becomes efficacious. He has observed alimentary and sexual prohibitions; he has fasted; he has dreamt; he has done this or that preliminary gesture; at least momentarily, the rite makes him another person.' [my translation]

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. Hertz (2004 [1960]: 80–1).
2. Hertz (2004 [1960]: 80–1, my abbreviation).
3. Hertz (2004 [1960]: 6); royal palm: *Roystonea* spp.
4. Vilaça (2006: 198, my translation).
5. Vilaça (2006: 301, my translation).
6. Conklin (2001: 75, my abbreviation).
7. Conklin (2001: 76–8).
8. Conklin (2001: 79).
9. Conklin (2001: 84–5).
10. Erikson (1996: 83–4).
11. Erikson (1996: 235).
12. Erikson (1996: 251).
13. Erikson (1996: 325).
14. Shepardson (1978: 384–5).
15. Reichard (1950: 42, my abbreviation).
16. Reichard (1950: 196, 601, 686–8).
17. Shepardson (1978: 393).
18. Shepardson (1978: 386); the vernacular term is *yeenaaldlooshii* (literally 'with it, he goes on all fours').
19. Kluckhohn (1944: 26).
20. Kluckhohn (1944: 139–40, my abbreviation).
21. Kluckhohn (1944: 179).
22. Kluckhohn (1949: 374–6).
23. Bray (2006: 44–5), Halder (2002: 104); according to Halder, such events still take place at present.
24. The Red False Mallow (*Sphaeralcea coccinea*).
25. Bray (2006: 44).
26. Bray (2006: 65).
27. Bray (2006: 65).
28. Halder (2002: 107).
29. Powers (1977: 93–5) provides a good description.
30. Halder (2002: 106–7, 125–7).
31. Ray (1945: 75).
32. Ray (1945: 90).
33. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 211).
34. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 8, 213–38).
35. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 236).
36. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 248).
37. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 118).
38. Batchelor (1901: 106).
39. Batchelor (1901: 58).
40. Batchelor (1901: 557).
41. Batchelor (1901: 569–70).
42. Kitagawa (1961: 132).
43. In the vernacular the dead are referred to as *hala' senalin*, what Endicott (1979: 111) translates as 'transformed superhuman being'.

44. Endicott (1979: 113).
45. Endicott (1979: 115, 142, 144).
46. Endicott (1979: 135–6).
47. Howell (1984: 111); Colugo: *Cynocephalidae* sp.
48. Howell (1984: 163); Mangrove Palm: *Nypa fruticans*.
49. Pandya (1993: xi, 53); cf. Radcliffe-Brown (1922: 137).
50. Pandya (1993: xxi, 68).
51. Radcliffe-Brown (1922: 313).
52. In the vernacular, it is referred to as *tanageru*.
53. Pandya (1993: 175, my abbreviation); cf. Pandya (2009: 52–3).
54. Pandya (1993: 261–3).
55. Cf. Radcliffe-Brown (1922: 100).
56. Pandya (1993: 239).
57. Pandya (1993: 262).
58. James (1988: 131).
59. James (1988: 126).
60. James (1979: 175).
61. James (1988: 128).
62. James (1988: 48–9).
63. James (1988: 294).
64. James (1988: 131).
65. James (1988: 133).
66. Straight (2007: 122); the entire section is based on Straight's chapter on death (2007: 115–28).
67. Straight (2007: 125).
68. Straight (2007: 65).
69. Ibid.
70. Quoted in Straight (2007: 82).
71. Straight (2007: 164).
72. Spencer (1988: 240).
73. Hertz (2004 [1960]: 38).
74. Hertz (2004 [1960]: 52).
75. Ingold (2011: 13, 145).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. Cf. Latour (2004: 38).
2. E.g. Eliade (1958).
3. Barrett (1925: 376).
4. Altschuler (1964: 117).
5. Barrett (1925: 326).
6. Cf. Praet (2006: 74–121).
7. Cf. Carrasco (1988: 152), Ventura (2000: 209–26).
8. The respective scientific names are *Lutra platensis*, *Opisthocomus hoazin*, *Psophia* sp. and *Electrophorus electricus* (Vilaça [2006: 309]).
9. Vilaça actually discusses three types of feasts, referred to as *tamara*, *huror-oin*, and *hwitop*. However, she shows that all three have a great deal in common and therefore I think it is justified to treat them as one.
10. The vernacular expression is *itam* (Vilaça [2006: 121]).
11. Vilaça (2006: 118).
12. Vilaça (2006: 128).
13. Cf. Erikson (1996: 246–50).
14. Erikson (1996: 294, my translation).

15. Erikson (1996: 299, my translation).
16. Erikson (1996: 306, my translation).
17. Erikson (1996: 318–9, my translation).
18. Erikson (1996: 302).
19. Reichard (1950: 466, 480, 487).
20. Reichard (1950: 19, 24).
21. Reichard (1950: 464–6, 569, 572).
22. Reichard (1950: 71).
23. Cf. Gabriel (1996: 125–56), Matthews (1889: 89–94).
24. Gabriel (1996: 153).
25. My account is based on Standing Bear (1928: 113–22), Powers (1977: 95–9), Hassrick (1964: 279–88), and Amiotte (1989: 75–90).
26. Halder (2002: 133, my abbreviation).
27. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 266–98).
28. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 49).
29. In the vernacular it is referred to as *yua*. According to Fienup-Riordan (1994: 51) it is the possessive form of *yuk*, person, literally ‘its person’.
30. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 271).
31. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 272).
32. Fienup-Riordan (1994: 279).
33. Akino (1999: 250).
34. In the vernacular, this festival is known as *iyomante*, literally ‘thing/send’ or ‘thing/let go’; cf. Utagawa (1999: 256).
35. I use Kitagawa’s (1961) ethnography of a 1958 bear festival in Piratori, Hokkaido, as the backbone of my description; but see also Irimoto (1994: *passim*).
36. Kitagawa (1961: 134).
37. Ohnuki-Tierney (1999: 241).
38. Kitagawa (1961: 144, my abbreviation).
39. Ohnuki-Tierney (1999: 244).
40. Dubreuil (1999: 297–8).
41. Tanimoto (1999: 283).
42. Kitagawa (1961: 148).
43. Howell (1984: 79).
44. Endicott (1979: 6, 8).
45. Endicott (1979: 68, my abbreviation).
46. Endicott (1979: 69).
47. Endicott (1979: 43–5, 69); in the vernacular of the Chewong they are referred to as *naga* and *tanko*; see Howell (1984: 83–5).
48. The Batek refer to these prohibitions as *lawac*, the Chewong as *talaiden*. See Endicott (1979: 70) and Howell (1984: 63, 80, 83).
49. Howell (1984: 84).
50. Howell (1984: 84), Endicott (1979: 72); Blunt (1981) has shown that the link between boisterous behaviour towards animals and punitive thunderstorms can not only be found in the Malay Peninsula, but throughout the Austronesian world.
51. Howell (1984: 241).
52. Endicott (1979: 155–7), Howell (1984: 79).
53. Endicott (1979: 155), Howell (1984: 73).
54. Endicott (1979: 150–2).
55. Howell (1984: 163).
56. Pandya (1993: 175–6).
57. Pandya (1993: 30–1).
58. Pandya (1993: 177).

59. Pandya (1993: 180); cf. Pandya (2009: 51).
60. Pandya (1993: 187).
61. Pandya (1993: 183, my abbreviation).
62. Pandya (1993: 191).
63. Pandya (1993: 30); cf. Pandya (2009: 113).
64. Radcliffe-Brown (1922: 206).
65. James (1979: 225).
66. James (1988: 292–6).
67. James (1988: 293, my abbreviations).
68. James (1988: 295).
69. James (1988: 334).
70. Jacobs (1965: 163).
71. Spencer (1988: 157); Straight (2007: 156).
72. Spencer (1997: 42).
73. In the vernacular, the festival is referred to as *eunoto* (Spencer 1988: 139); comparable ceremonies among the Samburu are referred to as *ilmugit*.
74. Spencer (1988: 151).
75. Spencer (1988: 149).
76. Spencer (1988: 168–9).
77. Hinde and Hinde (1901: 102–3), cited in Spencer (1988: 168).
78. Spencer (1988: 168).
79. Spencer (1988: 166).
80. Galaty (1983: 375).
81. Spencer (1988: 164).
82. Spencer (1988: 153, 159); Galaty (1983: 368, 375).
83. van Gennep (1960: 46).
84. Descola (2005: 192, my translation).

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